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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

OLSON'S FROBENIUS: TOWARDS A WORLD POEM

BY

PETER McGUIRE

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

FALL 1990

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Peter McGuire

10405 Saskatchewan Drive
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Date 9 October 1990

is change, presents
no more than itself

And the too strong grasping of it,
when it is pressed together and condensed
loses it

This very thing you are

-Charles Olson, "The Kingfishers"

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Professor Charles Schweger

Date: 5 October 1990

I dedicate this basic research to Kenneth White
in recognition of what he has taught me, and
for having asked me a question.

ABSTRACT

The basic aim of this thesis is to document the place of Leo Frobenius in the writings of Charles Olson, as well as to examine the parallels that exist between the work of these exploratory thinkers. My first concern is to demonstrate the sense and value of looking at culture concepts developed by Frobenius which form part of Olson's world view and aesthetic practice. By this, I mean to shed significant light on the relevance of Frobenian concepts and materials as they pertain to Olson's "post-modern" poetics and verse.

My examination of Olson's debt to Frobenian work in the morphology of culture can be outlined in terms of the following organization. First, a summary of the work of Frobenius is presented, and the special terms that are essential to that work are defined prior to the establishment of their relevance to Olson. Next, set initially within the context of Ezra Pound's mediating influence, the path of transmission of materials from Frobenius to Olson is traced, as the evidence, both published and unpublished, permits.* Thirdly, documentation and analysis of Frobenian parallels and direct affinities within Olson's writings follow, with especial emphasis on two major Olson texts, Call Me Ishmael and the Maximus Poems. The Soninke folktale "Gassire's Lute" is examined as a key text in the development of Olson's "post-modern" aesthetics. This research is tendered as a labour saving device, fit for the use of those who are able.

* This study brings forward previously unpublished documents (Olson's essays, correspondence and marginalia) from the Archives of the University of Connecticut Library.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

On the 28th of April, 1947, the English language translator of African Genesis, a Frobenian collection of African folk tales, wrote this letter:

> Have just received your letter. Frobenius is dead, the book is out of print & the copyright rests with me. So, as long as you give the book & its compilers ancient & modern some credit, go ahead—and send me a couple of copies of whatever appears. I gather you want a quick answer (I am also pressed for time at the moment) so this is it.
>
> Regards,
> Douglas C. Fox[1]

The recipient of the letter was Charles Olson: a thirty-six year old ex-politician, Melville scholar, occasional visitor to Ezra Pound (then interned at St. Elizabeth's), someone in the process of launching a new phase of activity. Fox's letter came in response to several literary proposals made by Olson regarding the work of Leo Frobenius.

Olson had recently published a major study of Herman Melville's Moby Dick. After some initial resistance on the part of editors, his Call Me Ishmael became available in 1947 with the help of Ezra Pound. In Pound's view, it made reading Melville's novel quite "unnecessary" (Encounter 138). When shown the manuscript in 1946, Pound had been struck by the similarity between Olson's fundamental concern for space and that of Leo Frobenius, the German culture morphologist who was familiar to English readers largely through Pound's interest and advocacy. At Pound's instigation, then, Olson quickly began to explore and expand upon his intellectual kinship with Frobenius, and this increasingly outside Pound's mediating influence. He was soon to write of the conditions in which he found himself as an artist:

> Space is the mark of new history, and the measure of work now afoot is the depth of the perception of space, both as space informs objects and as it contains, in antithesis of time...
>
> I use the word space in its full reference, as Giacometti or Henry Moore might; as De Sitter; as Frobenius, a propos paideumatic law, [for] example "In materialism the spatial tendency dominates everything." (Boundary 2)

Over the course of the next two decades, Olson would sustain an enlargement of his cultural space owing far more to Frobenius than has been acknowledged by Olson scholarship. In each push for his new "stance toward reality," Olson's writing presents diverse, continuous, implicit, and explicit acknowledgements of Frobenius as both a parallel explorer and a valued source of material (Human 51). In this respect, Olson might appear to be derivative of Pound, who had also extensively referred to Frobenius, but closer examination and analysis of their respective uses will show Olson's "post-modern" advance beyond Pound in this area.[2]

In fact, I would go further and suggest that Olson's world view and artistic practice has as much basis in Frobenius as in Pound or his other purely literary predecessors who have received much critical attention. His affinity for Frobenius, alongside even that for Pound, an affinity openly referred to on numerous occasions, should no longer be ignored, but must instead be weighed and brought to bear on the whole range of Olson studies. Such has clearly not been the case until now. A survey of the literature reveals that serious mention of Frobenius has been made only twice, Robert Creeley and more recently George Hutchinson being ones to note the importance of Frobenius to Olson in the crucial years of his emergence as a writer.[3] The Pound scholars have, for their part, long established the place and function

of Frobenius in Pound studies, it would be a mistake for Olson scholars to do less, or to assume that the Poundian connection provides the sufficient link.

Eva Hesse has observed that the achievement of seeing culture, no matter how far separated in time and space, as one single, living organism by perceiving a fundamental unity beyond the plurality of "cultures" belongs to Leo Frobenius, who in 1923 wrote

> We no longer live under a single horizon. The frontiers, the geographical divisions, the critical attention paid to racial factors -all of these requirements of the specialized sciences have been set aside. We see the earth in its entirety: we hold all in equal esteem. Nothing is of greater or of lesser interest to us. The vast process of becoming unfolds before our eyes as a single unity, from the stone flints of the diluvial cultures to the flower of Greek civilization or of the Gothic spirit. The whole of it is one huge tree, the tree of heaven, Ygdrasill. (qtd. in Hesse 45-46)

I would alter Hesse's observation slightly. For, although he was not the first to imagine all human societies as contemporaneous, Frobenius was the first anthropologist not only to see but <u>treat</u> them as such. His pluralistic and relativistic mode of thought, as Hesse suggests, while still anathema in many disciplines, nevertheless enriched and expanded the vanguard of modern thought and methodology. In physics, the shift was to the calculus of probability and to Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle. Likewise, attentions were elsewhere focussed on a non-Aristotelian logic, a non-Euclidian geometry, a 'non-grammatical' linguistics, etc. A priori categories of causality were either being questioned or abandoned. Of the new creed Alfred North Whitehead wrote

> This creed is that actual things perceived by our senses are in themselves the elements of a common world, and that this world is a complex of things, including indeed our acts of cognition, but transcending them....So far as there is dependence, the things pave the way for the cognition, rather

> than vice versa. The objectivist holds that the things experienced and the cognizant subject enter into the common world on equal terms. (84-85)

While advances in the human and physical sciences were encouraging intellectuals to consider the universe as a continuous manifold, recent archeological discoveries further stimulated ideas about man's place in the universe. Setting up the psychological framework for his Pound Era, Hugh Kenner speaks of a shock of recognition experienced by those Westerners who went into certain caves in southern France at the turn of the century. Of the encounter with our Pleistocene roots, he writes:

> The shock lay in this, that the horses and deer and aurochs brought the eye such immediacy of perception, though a disregard of up and down and through made them inconceivable in today's canons: and yet they seemed not to rely on yesterday's canons either. They simply existed outside of history. No felt continuum reached back to them....Time folded over; now lay flat, transparent, upon not-now. Devoid of information about those artists, the spectator could nowise take a time machine to their world. Nor would any evolutionary curve pass through them.
>
> Here was a lost visual mode thrust into the present, undimmed. No one could begin to imagine how it had felt to draw such things; one could only look at the confident lines. Picasso came from Barcelona to Altamira to look at them in 1902, at the threshold of a long career of being unabashed by the past. Their existence launched Leo Frobenius on a 40-year career as an anthropologist to whom African antiquity spoke today. (30)

In terms of physics, Einstein shook what had previously been thought to be unshakable axioms of matter and universe. In terms of human existence, Frobenius further rattled the world view with a concept of culture without end, into which all living knowledge be it universal, common, or personal would enter. According to Frobenius:

1. Culture or paideuma is an independent organism;
2. Man is not its subject, but rather its object or bearer. Man does not produce culture. Culture permeates man.

> 3. Culture is bi-polar. Its enhancements are born of the exchange of force between two diametrically opposed [i.e. time and space emphases] life streams. (Fox 329)

That Frobenian "scientific" discoveries were not a fundamental grounding for modernist art and thought suggests a dysfunction. When modernists ransacked the West (ie. Classical tradition) and the East for the best they had to offer, their attempt was not entirely free of of a nostalgia, even a need to reheat the closed system of classical discourse. What had been the accomplishment of Greeks or Renaissance humanists still provided the limits for many artists for whom nevertheless the total ground of knowledge had, like it or not, irreversibly shifted. A new stance toward reality, measured in individual, societal, and cosmic terms, was necessary. "I shall use Paideuma for the gristly roots of ideas that are in action," responded Ezra Pound (Guide 58). Eventually, Charles Olson would further explore the Frobenian concept of paideuma as a contextual understanding of his times. In his poem "These Days" Olson would suggest:

> whatever you have to say, leave
> the roots on, let them
> dangle
>
> And the dirt
>
> Just to make clear
> where they come from (Poems 106)

But here I am probably ahead of myself. It is necessary to sketch an outline of the variable conditions of art in this century in order to fully understand Olson's relationship to Frobenius, now that the principle of art in accord with knowledge has been advanced.

In the multiple stances of the art of this century, there are three tendencies: the classical, the modern, and the "post-modern."

The classical consists of various models, dead models mostly, admirable models as such but still dead even in the hands of living artists. The modern, in contrast, comprises the fragmentation of the classical models, expressing their negation and disintegration. Without entering into the constructive vs. destructive argument, the "post-modern" involves neither the unity of the model (the positive aspect of the classical) nor its fragmentation (the negative aspect of the modern). The "post-modern," in the sense I will be using the term, involves rather the discovery or, possibly, the recovery of a coherence and fluidity in art and experience.[4] Each of the art forms sketched here suggests a qualitative difference in the way the artist (ie. the creative thinker) conceives of, works, and directs himself. This can be suggested by the notion that, both in artistic and in general cultural terms, the world is to be found in the way one moves through it, by the possibilities of attitude that exist.

That Olson was fully convinced of the organismic, "post-modern" function of art within the shifting conditions of culture is already obvious in Call Me Ishmael, wherein he declares his willingness "to ride Melville's image of man, whale and ocean to find in him prophecies, lessons he himself would not have spelled out" (13). As a conscious cultural theorist, Olson would look to art not for ideal truth but for evidence of the dynamics of culture. He had seen the experience of space in Melville's Moby-Dick as the first sign of a "redistribution of value, mind & will" which was contrary to Western time bound historicism and teleology (Boundary 2). The "Man is Prospective" essay was a further attempt, marked by his preliminary reading of Frobenius, to distinguish between an inherited time based and a new space based

art:

> Time and space are in the relation of a parabola, plane to cone. Nor I nor Einstein would want to disentangle them. The point is...where man puts his stress. Earth, as a great Italian made clear to us a long time ago, is a way to heaven....
> From Dante to Pound it has been problems of time which governed men. It is no longer so. We are more separated from these men than we know, and if some have not sensed the decline...it does not matter. Others already know their fathers and faiths are elsewhere. The path does die.

This last phrase, taken from Frobenius (as is the time/space cultural framework of the essay being cited), recurs frequently through Olson's early writing.[5] It must have struck a deep chord in Olson, who in Call Me Ishmael had remarked that the very shape and trajectory of Western thought had led humanity away from "Zeus, Odysseus, Olympus" and toward "Caesar, Faust, the City" (14). The diminishment had slowly emerged out of adherence to what Olson would come to call the Greek means of logic and classification. Aesthetics has no place in his work apart from total organismic cultural integrity; his art is not a servant of the state. In the "Human Universe" essay (1951), he would soon write:

> What it comes to is ourselves, that we do not find ways to hew to experience as it is, in our definition and expression of it....There must be a means for the expression of this, a way which is not divisive as all the tag ends and upendings of the Greek way are. There must be a way bears in instead of away, which meets head on what goes on each split second, a way which does not --in order to define--prevent, deter, distract, and so cease the act of, discovering. (Human 5-6)

If the only history that matters is the history of attention, and the vital elements of knowledge are grounded upon an identity of discovery and definition, then a truly post-modern art would have to function within the context of mythology as well as history, just as classical and modern derivative art forms, because of their deductive historical

preoccupations, tended not to.

In "Notes for the Proposition: Man is Prospective," written in 1948, Olson puts forward conjectures for the individual, the society, and the cosmos. His conjectures are based on a continuous and manifold cultural formulation that distinctly recalls the Frobenian tertiary concept of paideuma. Of the present Olson writes:

> The premise: that 100 years of analysis into the ways of man and universe
>
> (Marx Darwin Renan Fourier Sorel
> Frazer Freud Spengler Kierkegaard
> Einstein De Sitter Frobenius
> & some now alive Saint Francis)
>
> is enough.
>
> A 1st assumption is, that those motions actually shape up into a direction as profound as the change of attention we call the Renaissance, ... a contrary Renaissance. (Boundary 1)

The recent advance or shift in knowledge is enough to suggest to Olson a total shift in cultural grounding. Advances in what was known of our humanity and universe could, Olson speculates, provide for "a humanitas eased out of contemporary narrows" (2). Moreover, he feels that art is the place to look for the evidence of a new synthesis. In order for us to see the dimensions of change that Olson has in mind, we must understand the Frobenian premise on which the essay proceeds. The materialism of present cultural conditions has already, as Olson applies Frobenius, signalled the end of an entire cycle of historical development. The "contrary Renaissance," if there is to be one, would have to proceed in dimensions which are radically different from what has gone before (1).

Evaluating his situation in 1950, he asserted, with the boldness of someone attempting to square the circle of individual, society, and cosmos for the first time, that:

> I meant it, in Ishmael, that we are the last first people. Therefore I find it awkward to call myself a poet or a writer. If there are no walls there are no names. This is the morning after the dispersion, and the work of the morning is methodology: how to use oneself, and on what. That is my profession. I am an archeologist of morning. (Prose 40)

With classicism and modernism time bound, Olson had little choice but to venture in the direction of space. Evidence of Olson's new concerns, his choices and his predilections is found not only in his theoretical prose but in the poems as well. "La Torre", for instance, is a poem begun during the period of his first reading Frobenius. In its verbal imagery the influence of Fenollosa is obvious, but the Protean openness of cultural form tracked in mutation throughout the dynamics of the poem is far more indebted to Frobenius. The poem can be read as a kind of morphological gloss to Olson's "Kingfishers" and as a "post-modern" metonymic response to the Modernist apocalyptics of, say, W.B. Yeats' "The Second Coming" or "The Tower." It merits quotation more in full than in part:

> The end of something has a satisfaction
> When the structures go, light
> comes through
>
> To begin again: Lightning
> is an axe, transfer
> of force subject to object is
> order! destroy!
>
> To destroy
> is start again, is factor of
> sun, fire is
> when the sun is out

Stand clear! Here
it comes down and with it the heart has
what was, what was
we do lament

Let him who knows not how to pray
go to sea

Where there are no walls
there are no laws
to grab hold of

Let the tower fall!
Where space is born
man has a beach to ground on

. . . . . .

In the laden air
we are no longer cold.
Birds spring up, and on the fragrant sea
rafts come toward us lashed of wreckage and young tree.
They bring the quarried stuff we need to try this new-found strength.
It will take new stone, new tufa, to finish off this rising tower.

(Poems 189-90)

In their context of cultural change, Olson's subsequent poems explore a cultural impulse that is without apocalypse and without end. Olson interprets the seismic shift of attentions entering the twentieth century not as chaos or as cultural disintegration but as a movement toward fresh cultural space. "Paidea is . . . first act and fruit of culture," says Olson, who goes on to say that paideuma is "a concept of culture we very much need [because] paideuma as such is without end: no one of us is likely to come within any distance of the third great force of man, the religious sense, if culture is not seen as precept as long as we are alive" (Boundary 9). It is this concept of paideuma that the chapters of this thesis will gradually explore. The growth of the paideuma is measured in its individual, social and universal forms. This concept should contribute toward a more complete understanding of

Olson's "post-modern" work, including the Maximus Poems. I make no inordinate claims for the influence of Frobenius on Olson. He certainly is an essential part of the intellectual context out of which Olson's work stems. I would contend, moreover, that Frobenian ideas and materials provided Olson with a means to clarify his move beyond a narrow artistic context of the New Criticism into new areas of literal, abstract, and mythological potential.

My examination of the affinities and parallels operating between the work of Frobenius and that of Olson will be structured as follows. In Chapter Two, a summary of the work of Frobenius will be presented with emphasis on the materials Olson gained access to. Chapter Three, my analysis of Call Me Ishmael, will focus on those aspects which seem to parallel Frobenius. This has never been done, although Olson himself requested such an examination. Chapter Four will delve into Olson's shift from general cultural theory to a "post-modern" poetical stance. Here evidence from his various correspondence, essays and poetry will be considered in the light of a key African text. Finally, in Chapter Five, I will consider the Maximus Poems in order to further demonstrate the place of Frobenius in Olson's "muthologos." This study will bring forward previously unpublished documents (essays, correspondence, and marginalia) from the Olson Archives when they pertain to the subjects under discussion.

Notes:

1. Copyright of the University of Connecticut Library. See appendix for the complete letter.

2. I will be employing "post-modern" as a special term throughout this study, a term not limited to or by art as such. The impetus for such a usage of course comes from Olson himself, who placed "the act of writing in the context of post-modern man," and not vice versa:

> The effort is definitely non-literary. Neither the reading in "literature," like they say, nor the writing "composition." The amount of either is not at all the question. The idea is to enable the person to achieve the beginnings of a disposition toward reality now, by which he or she can bring himself or herself to bear as value. (Olson 2 28).

This special term as it is used here also stems from the research of Kenneth White, who has given articulate and prospective form to "post-modernism" as a grounded working condition, rather than allow it to be taken over by those who would signify some ersatz tectonic style or linkage of classical and modern. I gratefully acknowledge White as the source of the analysis of "classicism, modernism, and post-modernism," which appears in this chapter. He is the originator also of the terms "geoculture," "geopoetics," and "cultural space" as I have encountered them again by a happy coincidence. Of the "post-modern" condition White writes:

> For the last five years, I have been living on the north coast of Brittany, which I consider at once a symbolic and a strategic situation....The landscape is what is called in geology a 'centred complex', which is exactly how I feel. And I am looking out on the Atlantic, from which area, according to Frobenius (in The Destiny of Civilizations), in the wake of societies based on myth, religion, philosophy and techno-economics, the germs, the first winds, of a new civilization, or at least what I'm calling 'cultural space', may rise—if we work hard enough at it. (13)

3. Creeley was aware of the importance of Frobenius to Olson from the start and was the first to speak of Olson's work in terms of culture morphology. See his advertisement for the Divers Press edition of Mayan Letters. More recently, see "The Pleistoscene in the Projective: Some of Olson's Origins." American Literature 54.1 (1982), pp. 83-84, where George Hutchinson writes:

> From the work of Leo Frobenius and his American assistant, Douglas C. Fox, Olson learned about the anthropological methods of culture morphology, which seeks to discover the meaning and phenomena of culture as such" (what Frobenius

called "paideuma") by correlating the development of civilization as a unity, according to meaning, geographical distribution, and chronological order. Frobenius claimed that in order to pass judgement upon any cultural artifact one must take a comprehensive view of all knowledge concerning "the facts of culture" itself. Moreover, he specified the major problem of culture morphology as concerning the origins and development of Egyptian and Babylonian civilization "geographically, historically, and philosophically." Olson immediately adopted Frobenius's methodology and direction.

4. See note 2 and the following comments by Charles Boer in his revealing memoir of Charles Olson which is addressed to the poet himself:

> You talked of your work, and of yourself, as "post-modern," or "post-literary." Your purpose in writing was not the making of "literature." From the vantage point of the post-literary, the rules and directions of anything "literary" were obsolete. Such a position is beyond conventional criticism, which of course remains "literary." "No Greek will be able to discriminate my body," your poem goes. This was not arrogance, I think, so much as it was self-interest in the best sense. You saw poetry, the primary mode of expression in all pre-literary societies, as your own best post-literary means of knowing and articulating order.
>
> The art of saying something well in verse just wasn't enough, in itself, to interest you....Your own work was of another order altogether. The proper response to it was some expression of surprise or disbelief or astonishment at the discovery of some "fact." (63-4)

5. See Chapter Four for discussion of "der weg stirbt."

CHAPTER TWO: FROBENIUS, FROM POUND, TO OLSON

FROBENIUS

The Work

Leo Frobenius was born in Berlin in 1873. His first work, "Secret Societies in Africa" (1894), proved to be untenable to the scientific community of the time. From the first, Frobenius saw it was necessary to go to the sources rather than to apprentice himself to an academic institution. His doctoral thesis, "The Origins of African Culture," rejected by a German university, Frobenius pursued his own course. As Eike Haberland, the editor of a centenary anthology of his writings, puts it: "his entire life-work, his research institute with its many collaborators, his numerous research expeditions, his extensive scientific archives--these he supported during his lifetime with funds he raised himself" (Anthology 223). In many ways, his Africa Institute and Ethnological Museum in Frankfurt could stand as the reified counterpart to the university Ezra Pound never founded.

The intense drive and energy were there from the start. As the introduction to this thesis suggests, what initially got Leo Frobenius started was the discovery, in 1895, of the contents of Altamira cave. He wondered what had happened to a culture that had produced an art, "neither primitive nor simple" but which could rival that of the 19th century (Pictures 13). To the young Frobenius this was no mere academic question, and he was not in the least satisfied with the academic conclusions that Pleistocene culture, in its glowing vitality, had simply disappeared without a trace. Frobenius would not acquiesce in the complaisant erudition and the general dubious silence of his day which presumed that our modern, positivistic existence was the pinnacle

to which all culture and history aspired. When the beginnings of civilization were still being set by most at around 3000 B.C., Frobenius pursued his own course.[1]

The basis of Frobenian thought is not his anthropological method as such but his intense desire to involve himself in "the idea of culture per se, as a totality, as a whole" (16). This desire led him away from the dominant intellectual ethnocentrism of his day, and towards a sort of cultural relativism that Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803) had earlier anticipated. His ability to see and treat all human cultures as parts of a single living organism, and to grasp a fundamental unity behind the plurality of cultures, revealed Frobenius as the spiritual descendant of a line of theorists going back at least as far as Giambattista Vico (1668-1744) who had read "Homer" as the work of an entire people, rather than of one poet. Frobenius declared his intuitive intellectual line by means of a passage from Goethe which serves as his epigraph to a central text, Paideuma: "The world as a whole may progress, but every young person must begin at the beginning and live through all the epochs of world culture for himself" (Anthology 19).

Faced with the inexplicable evidence of a former splendid culture, Frobenius posed the problem in these terms:

> Had it not died, its descendants would have to be sought elsewhere; had it really died, some traces of its cultural increment were bound to have cropped up in the cultures of a later period. (Pictures 15)

He set about addressing the problem in terms of a European-African connection. If rock painting had flourished during the Pleistocene era, why not look for clues to its meaning among those peoples of Africa who

still painted pictures on rocks? If the paintings would not speak, why not allow the myths, folktales and legends of today to speak, however haltingly, of yesterday? Frobenius was looking for a last remainder.

In the final years of the 19th century, he began by making some methodological suggestions as to the scope of the task at hand:

> 1. The most difficult obstacle to our understanding of culture is our own ignorance. We do not know enough. Any trained zoologist, given the leg of a beetle, can tell you the name of the bug it belongs to, and no botanist supposes that roses bloom on oak trees. We are familiar with the characteristics of the chemical elements, know how they can be combined, and that in combination they again have different characteristics. We even know what these characteristics are. But what do we know about culture? Nothing. Because we are lazy, phlegmatic and stupid, because we plume ourselves if we can string five or ten citations together to write a witty, anecdotal paper.
>
> 2. What do we need, then? Work! And more work! Every fact, object and belief which can help us to understand the growth of human culture should be recorded and indexed for use. It is a pure question of application, first to get the material together and then to see how much we can learn alone from the geographic distribution of certain culture elements.
>
> 3. We will find that there are peoples of whom we do not know enough, and so it will be necessary to send out expeditions to find and gather the material we lack.
>
> 4. It will be our task to handle our material not only linguistically, descriptively and philologically but also graphically. That means that every expedition will be equipped with a staff of artists who will transfer to paper and canvas that which cannot be recorded accurately with the camera.
>
> 5. That is to say, one of the main tasks of a future serious "science of culture" and of a true culture-morphology will be to establish institutions for research and to send out expeditions. (16-17)

In a series of twelve major expeditions, with some lasting four years, Frobenius organized his perceptions and intuitive understanding

of the meaning of culture through direct experience of various African cultures and peoples. He was an example of the kind of historian, the Herodotan type, who must go to a place in order to see. The expeditions from 1904 to 1935 took him to the Congo, the Kasai, West Africa, Morocco, Algiers, Tripoli, the diverse regions of the Sahara, Egypt, the Sudan, the Red Sea, and South Africa. He knew the desert, the bush, the savanna and the tropical forest. Moreover, he knew the peoples of these many regions, their connection to particular landscapes and their cultural inter-relationships. His field work soon brought together a vast array of cultural particulars collectively known as the Africa-Archives. Having gathered this material, Frobenius brought forward his concept of culture as an independent entity. He never limited his work and attention to the strict ethnographic description of the facts (as Boas arguably had done) but treated culture as a living essence exhibiting form.

With paideuma Frobenius set up a concept for understanding rather than simply describing the welter of cultural information in respect of space and time. Culture, in the sense that Frobenius understands it, arises out of two dominant forces : the "masculine" of action and the "feminine" of stillness and place (ruhe und raum). The male force is that of direction, centripetal expansion, intensity, considering the female space as distance to traverse and measure, and is therefore volatile, unstable, density ridden. The feminine is the force of centrifugal return, the place of regeneration. Paideuma entails growth and decline:

> Cultural manifestations are to be regarded as expressions of an organic unity which is not something man-made so much as something that imposes itself on men. We call this "culture", but the term is too vague and hackneyed

> on the one hand and too specialized on the other. For this reason, I have adopted the term "Paideuma". This may be described as a substantive entity with its own laws of development, unfolding in three main stages: first "intuitively" in the daemonic world of childhood, then "idealistically" in the cultural and intellectual world of youth, and finally "mechanistically" in the active world of grown men. After these three organic stages comes the the inorganic condition of senility. (Anthology 43)

Of these dynamics and growth stages more will be said in the context of the subsequent sections of this thesis.

Frobenius defined his overall work as culture morphology: bringing together of materials of history, pre-history, and ethnography so as to provide a global perspective of human existence inclusive of those areas not illuminated by a written record. This entailed the expansion of study both into the distant past and out beyond the confines of the literate civilizations of Europe and the Near East. Frobenius sought not only to penetrate particular cultures but culture as such, and with it the entire history of human existence. In an attempt to sum up these achievements, Eike Haberman says that Frobenius "tried to grasp and to explain the forces and motives that lead to the origin of culture, the laws governing its course, the interrelationship between man and culture, and the meaning and goal of historical development" (225). Frobenius was aware of the strengths and limitations of his approach and prefaced his statements accordingly:

> The following lines are not intended to depict one culture or another, but rather to help the reader to apprehend what I have called "Paideuma", that is to say the spiritual essence of culture in general. What I have to say does not answer the question "This is how things are", but rather "This is how they are to be understood". My investigation is not concerned with modern psychology or physiology: it is obliged to pursue its own way, so as to remove from the path what would otherwise be gross and insurmountable obstacles. At the same time it is a modest inquiry, and in a sense an unscientific one. This may be perceived in the use of a special terminology and forms of language which are not readily intelligible, because

> their subject-matter is not. In particular, I have found it necessary for certain purposes to replace the word "culture" by the special term "Paideuma" as above defined. (21)

The Books

Apart from the extensive field work, much of Frobenius' energies were expended in making the remote available for understanding, as much a concern for him as for poets like Pound and Olson. His guiding aim was to foster a change in "lebensgefuhl," or feeling for life, and in large part books and exhibitions were his means. To this new feeling for life he would dedicate his efforts, saying by way of a preface to Prehistoric Rock Pictures in Europe & Africa:

> It is my hope that the enormous perspective of human growth and existence which has been opened to us by these pictures and by the researches of the modern prehistorian may serve to contribute in some small measure to its development. (28)

For our purposes, his writings may be roughly divided into three major categories: philosophy and methods, with Paideuma central here; African art, with rock art central here; and ethnography of African cultures, with the encyclopaedic collection of folktales central. The seven volume Erlebte Erdteile (1925-1929) presents his concept of paideuma and his morphological approach to culture and change. From his first examination of it, Pound called for an immediate translation, a call that has gone unheeded even now. The twelve volume Atlantis series is a compilation of the folktales, myths, and legends from throughout Africa. Along with visual art, Frobenius recorded and used the present spoken word as a means for penetrating back into the meanings of the larger, distant past:

> What do the pictures mean? Now it is a fact that European pictures have, on the surface, very little to say. No one lives who can tell about their origin,

> and were it not for the thought which gave rise to the search for their like in Africa, their silence might well have been eternal. At the beginning my hope was so small that I could hardly have backed it with a positive: "I am sure." But, since then, our rich experience has enabled us to say: "That which existed once in Europe lives on among its epigones in Africa today." (Pictures 21-22)

As was mentioned above, there is no ready access to Frobenian texts and materials for those without German. Until the 1930s, there was almost nothing of his in print in English. The New English Weekly published a six part summary entitled "Frobenius' Paideuma: A Philosophy of Culture" in 1936. Again under Pound's prodding, New Directions released the collection of folktales, African Genesis, in 1937. Prehistoric Rock Paintings in Europe and Africa was published during the same year, originally serving as the catalogue for an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art. In time, Olson, without German fluency, came to own and demonstrate the value of the above mentioned texts, but Olson's initial exposure to Frobenius was passive, indirect, and via Ezra Pound. Particulars of when and why he obtained these materials will, of course, be addressed in the subsequent discussion that traces Olson's use of them.

The Influence

This thesis confines itself to an examination of the influence Frobenius had on artists such as Pound and then Olson. This in itself is entirely appropriate. The fact is that, in scientific circles, the work of Frobenius has been largely either disregarded or misread. Bronislaw Malinowski dismissed him early with half a sentence; one anthropologist called him a student of Spengler thereby reversing the true relationship. Guy Davenport is probably right to conclude that,

for the time being at least, Leo Frobenius has enriched imaginative minds more than scientific:

> Pound sees such influence as the poet registering sensibilities in advance of the specialists. Yeat's A Vision, for instance, owes much to Spengler and Frobenius (translated aloud by Pound at Rapallo). Guillaume Apollinaire was inspired early by Frobenius collection of primitive art, and probably led Matisse, Derain, Vlaminck, and Picasso in that direction. Frobenius had published the first essays on primitive art as art in 1895 and 1897. ("Pound and Frobenius" 44)

But fertile appreciation of Frobenius' work must be understood as going beyond the aesthetic concerns of Modernism, as already suggested in Chapter One.

For the purposes of this thesis, Frobenian production has been recognized by only five diverse enterprises. Guy Davenport identifies three of them as : Oswald Spengler's monumental Decline of the West, Karl Jung's use of Frobenian theories and materials in the context of mythology, and Pound's cultural project, which is of course Davenport's focus. The present study will add to these former the writing and the activities of both D.H. Lawrence and Charles Olson who contribute a fourth and a fifth enterprise, with Olson's being one which remarkably touches on aspects of the previous four.[2]

Given the fact that this thesis attempts to trace the influence of a culture morphologist on a poet, brief mention of the notions of poetic composition held by Frobenius is in order, before discussing the line of transmission whereby Pound links him to Olson. The relationship between culture morphology as method and poetry as method is already evident in Frobenius' writings when he establishes the dichotomy of intuitive vs. mechanistic modes. All poetic composition tends to present itself as "an inheritance from remote ages," but works in the

mechanistic and intuitive modes have nothing in common apart from "an external similarity of language and subject matter" (Anthology 24). Missing from the mechanistic approach to composition is the intensity "of an old dame who herself half-believes the story she is telling." According to Frobenius, the difference was best explained to him by some Baluba villagers:

> "In the tushimuni everything is alive--gabuluku (small antelopes), ngulu (wild boar), kashiama (leopard). When the tale is told, you can hear them all speak. But the mukanda only tells you what happened to them once upon a time. Tushimuni can happen today, tomorrow or yesterday; mukanda are things that happened once and for all, dead things." To make himself clearer, one of the men talking to me pointed to an elephant's skull in front of the hut and said: "That nsevu (elephant) is dead--he can't live again, and neither can the mukanda. But the tushimuni is just as much alive as the nsevu that comes every night and browses on our manioc fields. The mukanda are dead bones, the tushimuni are living flesh." (26)

The "daemonic," freshening elements of poetic/narrative composition and audience are closer to intuitive foundations of paideumatic growth. The mosaic of literature, whether oral or written, contains both these organic and the other, mechanistic, "factual" elements. "Clearly," declares Frobenius, "the despised African is closer to a daemonic or intuitive apprehension of the core of his civilization than are we intellectualized westerners, from whom the paideuma is hidden by an accumulation of soulless, objective facts" (27). The intuitive poet alone is capable of writing:

> Off-shore, by islands hidden in the blood
> jewels & miracles, I, Maximus
> a metal hot from boiling water, tell you
> what is a lance, who obeys the figures of
> the present dance (Maximus 5)

But that, of course, is Olson, and now I must get to him by way of Ezra Pound.

FROBENIUS, FROM POUND

In his carefully balanced eulogy for the dead poet, Guy Davenport tried to evaluate (in 1972) not only the life and work of Ezra Pound but also the times in which he lived. His estimation is at once an admission concerning Pound and a criticism of the times:

> How strange his condemnation of usury sounded to a world that had forgotten the rage of Ruskin against the shrinking of all values into the shilling; the passionate voices of Fourier, Thoreau and Marx that men were becoming the slaves of factories and banks.
>
> Nothing characterizes the twentieth century more than its inability to pay attention to anything for more than a week. Pound spent the last third of his life learning that the spirit of the century was incoherence. Men who forget the past are doomed to repeat it, and the century has idiotically stumbled along repeating itself, its wars, its styles in the arts, its epidemics of unreason. Joyce, not Pound was the voice of the century. (Geography 172)

Pound saw that culture was debased by a deflation or inflation of the currency of knowledge. Pound felt he had entered the "cultural" scene in England at a time when aesthetic values were divorced from facts, to the extent that they were ciphers of taste, arranged at will and serving inherited systems of abstract thought. Facts, on the other hand, were considered to be merest phenomena.

The Pre-Raphaelites (and Pound began as their epigone) had, for their part, certainly wanted to reform the ills of their society, but without facts brought to the task their work could only be retrospective and aesthetic in an effete and powerless sense. Put another way, "to offer Rossettian tosh as poetry in 1911 was not to stride into eternal realms but to misconceive 1911" (Kenner 80). Such was the conclusion Pound himself in due course came to.

> For three years, out of key with his time,
> He strove to resuscitate the dead art
> Of poetry; to maintain 'the sublime'
> In the old sense. Wrong from the start. (Shorter Poems 205)

Having done his epigonic work, he moved quickly toward an art that would take its energy from more primal and archaic sources.

It is now generally perceived that Pound's true career began with his crucial interaction with Fenollosa's notebooks. Finding with Ernest Fenollosa that a true poetry agrees with inductive science rather than the deductive premises of logic, Pound pointed the way for a new kind of poetry. He identified the essential unity between the current state of knowledge and poetry: the structure of the sentence was to be seen as a mirror of natural and mental processes. Evident in his assertions was the idea that art, like science, should discard the conception of reality manifest in the strict subject/predicate division for that of a field of force. When Fenollosa went on to observe that, "all processes in nature are interrelated," the implication for language was that "there could be no complete sentence," beyond one which would take all time to pronounce (11). Closed form and the catalogue of metaphoric selection were suddenly retrospective; the prospect was of an ecology of mind and language, a vision of culture without end.

Critical attention to the Pound/Frobenius connection began in earnest during the 1950s with the pioneering explications of Hugh Kenner and Guy Davenport among others. The importance of Frobenius to Pound has continued to be a subject of discussion (emphasized by the existence of a journal of Pound studies entitled Paideuma). As with Fenollosa, the place of Frobenius in Pound's work has been linked to the ideogramatic method that Pound devised in order to pursue his

cultural project, the Cantos. In the process of tracking the transmission of Frobenius from Pound to Olson, these matters of artistic focus are, of course, central. Frobenian contributions toward the "problematic" search for proper and fundamental forms were what Pound most appreciated in his theory and methods.

Frobenius sought to demonstrate his hypothesis of culture as an organic cycle of birth, growth, zenith, decay, and death through field work and a technique of graphic montage. This method involved gathering the "total" available information of an area and then plotting the distribution of artifacts, sociofacts, and ideofacts on maps. Each map was analogous to a single frame in a motion picture since Frobenius had already recognized the error of static culture definitions. He was more interested, rather, in discerning trait movements across time and space. Significantly, he did not perceive a "death" of culture in the final sense, as it has come to us by way of his student, Spengler.

Both Pound and Frobenius summoned enormous personal energies in pursuit of the cultural particulars that would restore access to the larger life of a universal culture or paideuma, one amid the errors of western civilization and the other within the archaic foundations of African culture. In this respect, their aim was the same. In his attempt to trace the shifting path of human error, Pound clearly found "paideuma" to be a great conceptual tool and pedagogic focus, one that became central to his own work. He shared in Frobenius' attempt to perceive a structure beneath the clutter of civilization and behind the veil of degenerate knowledge. Pound thought of paideuma as a structure that could not be lost but which could be rejuvenated for the establishment of true order:

> To escape a word or a set of words loaded up with dead association Frobenius uses the term Paideuma for the tangle or complex of the inrooted ideas of any period. Even were I to call this book the New Learning I should at least make a bow to Frobenius....
>
> When I said I wanted a new civilization, I think I could have used Frobenius' term.
> At any rate for my own use and for the duration of this treatise I shall use Paideuma for the gristly roots of ideas that are in action.
>
> I shall leave "Zeitgeist" as including also the atmospheres, the tints of mental air and the idees recues, the notions that the great mass of people still hold from habit, from waning custom.
>
> The "New Learning" under the ideogram of the mortar can imply whatever men of my generation can offer the successors as a means of the new comprehension....
>
> CH'ING MING, a new Paideuma will start with that injunction as has every conscious renovation of learning.
>
> 正名
>
> (Guide 57-58)

Here again we can see Pound's insistence on concept in accord with fact, the notion of cultural form as indivisible from tangible proof. As he wrote to Eliot: "Frazer worked largely from documents. Frob.[sic] went to things, memories still in the spoken tradition" (Letters 336). Frobenius had tested his hypotheses in the field; his non-static mode of documentation was reinscribed by kinematic representation using various montage techniques. While artifacts, ideofacts and sociofacts were all gathered and their distributions plotted, Frobenius was most interested in discerning trait-movements and found no culture to be hermetic. Pound generally tended to concur with what he saw as this "inductive" approach.

According to Guy Davenport and biographer Noel Stock, Pound began

reading Frobenius in the decade following the disaster of the first war. Yeats speaks of Pound's growing enthusiasm for Frobenius in a letter written in the late twenties:

> Ezra Pound has just been in. He says, 'Spengler is a Wells who has founded himself on German scholarship instead of English journalism.'" He is sunk in Frobenius, Spengler's German source, and finds him a most interesting person. Frobenius suggested the idea that cultures (including arts and sciences) arise out of races, express those races as if they were fruits and leaves in a pre-ordained order and perish with them; and the two main symbols, the Cave and the Boundless. He proved from his logic, some German told Ezra, that a certain civilization must have once existed at a certain spot in Africa, and then went and dug it up. I can not read German so must get him second hand. He has confirmed a conception I have had for many years, a conception that has freed me from British liberalism and all its dreams....Science is the criticism of Myth. There would be no Darwin had there been no Book of Genesis, no electron but for the Greek atomic myth; and when the fire of criticism is finished there is not even a drift of ashes on the pyre. Sexual desire dies because every touch consumes the Myth, and yet a Myth that can not be so consumed becomes a spectre. (153-54)

Clearly, Pound and Yeats saw similar corroborating forms in Frobenius' work. But what was for Yeats a mirror to his own fatalism was for Pound a vortex of potential, a source of instigation. Where Yeats was both doomed and free, Pound, the cosmopolitan, experienced a simultaneous exhilaration and weight of responsibility: to form a new paideuma after the debacle of World War One. Pound needed a non-hermetic approach to culture to rejuvenate his Eurocentric space. A paradox, or a contradiction?

In cultural terms, Pound's view of "evil" amounts to the lapse, be it conscious or unconscious, from the "green world" of a verifiable, common, manifest universe. His single measure and ultimate standard of human conduct is desire for balance between ideas and concrete reality.

> Usura is a murrain, usura
> blunteth the needle in the maid's hand

> and stoppeth the spinner's cunning. Pietro Lombardo
> came not by usura
> Duccio came not by usura
> nor Pier della Francesca; Zuan Bellin not by usura
> nor what 'La Calunnia' painted.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Usura rusteth the chisel
> It rusteth the craft and the craftsman. (Cantos 229-30)

Usura, whatever consciously does not square with reality, amounts to a spurious lapse of being, a gap in Confucian sincerity, or what the Neoplatonists once called sin. Pound's castigation of disparity be it in art, economics, politics, religion, philosophy or the daily news is a crucial element of his thought. His was an intellectual but moreover a cultural engagement. And, if he may at times have dealt in politics and economics that were "beyond his depth," his attempt at congruity can account for the bulk of his aesthetic insights and technical innovations which in turn contain a vast array of ethical and philosophical implications.

The major cultural significance of Pound's imperatives is that they are directed against the diverse abstract tendencies of Western thought. His criticism stands as a running account of his conviction that "any general statement is like a check drawn on a bank. Its value depends on what there is to meet it" (ABC 25). When Frobenius finally appears in Pound's work, it is within this context.

In prose, Pound writes:

> The modern university was founded at Frankfurt by Leo Frobenius, or, at least the first approach to the modern university. If I had been thirty-five years younger, I would have wanted to enroll myself as a student. (qtd. in "Pound and Frobenius" 43)

And in verse it is the same. Frobenius validates the periplum; thereby he himself enters into the ideograms:

> The white man who made the tempest in Baluba
> Der im Baluba das Gewitter gemacht hat...
> they spell words with a drum beat
>
> . . . . . .
>
> The ragged arab spoke with Frobenius and told him
> The names of 3000 plants.
> Bruhl found languages full of detail
> Words that half mimic action; but
> generalization is beyond them, a white dog is
> not, let us say, a dog like a black dog. (Cantos 189)

This was Frobenius of the careful mind, Frobenius the rainmaker

Frobenius appears in Pound's prose and poetry in essentially two ways: firstly, as yet another unknown victim in a Western conspiracy of intellectual silence and, more importantly, as another bringer of culture into the Poundian periplum. Frobenius was the very first anthropologist to treat a plurality of cultures as equally valid and contemporaneous. Frobenius provided Pound with an organic concept of culture (paideuma) and an inductive approach to cultural particulars in a process of change (Kulturmorphologie). These provisions together comprise or, at the very least, illuminate Pound's own historical method, which is to see through the debris of modern civilization its paideumatic structure which is not lost but ripe for rejuvenation under the influence of the best of human history, be it certain Italian city states or dynastic China, provided that the nature of error which ruined it can be known and removed.

> The writings of Frobenius [Pound writes] contain flashes of illumination. From nineteenth-century philology, relegating everything to separate compartments, creating specialists capable of writing monographs or articles for encylopedias without the least understanding of their import or relation to the total problem, Frobenius advanced to Kulturmorphologie. He brought the living fact to bear on the study of dead documents. (qtd. in "Frobenius and Pound" 42)

Pound embraced the kind of navigation of particulars afforded by Frobenius.[3] Erlebte Erdteile demonstrated an inductive and organic approach to the materials of knowledge that considered every object or event in culture. In Make It New (1934), Pound stated his belief in the efficacy of Confucian sincerity, a belief reaffirmed in the Cantos and elsewhere. By the time he published Guide to Kulchur (1938), Pound had situated in his "unwobbling pivot" the work of Frobenius: "Kung is modern in his interest in folk-lore. All this Frazer-Frobenius research is Confucian" (272). In his view of an ideal order, Pound attempts to demonstrate a thorough integration of Frobenius' work along Confucian personal, social, and cosmic lines. The following passage is intricate and cannot be summarized with justice:

> I shall use Paideuma for the gristly roots of ideas that are in action...Mencius Epistemology starts from this verse: the men of old wanting to clarify and diffuse throughout the empire that light which comes from looking straight into the heart then acting, first set up good government in their own states; wanting good government in their states, they first established order in their families; wanting order in the home, they first disciplined themselves; desiring self-discipline, they rectified their own hearts; and wanting to rectify their hearts they sought precise verbal definitions of their inarticulate thoughts (the tones given off by the heart); wishing to attain precise verbal definitions, they set to extend their knowledge to the utmost. This completion of knowledge is rooted in sorting things into organic categories. When things had been classified in organic categories, knowledge moved toward fulfillment; given extreme knowable points, the inarticulate thoughts were defined with precision (the sun's lance coming to rest on the precise spot verbally). Having attained this precise verbal definition (aliter, this sincerity), they then stabilized their hearts, they disciplined themselves; having attained self-discipline, they set their own house in order; having order in their homes, they brought good government to their own states; and when their states were well governed, the empire was brought into equilibrium. From the Emperor, Son of Heaven, down to the common man, singly and all together, this self-discipline is the root -i.e. the paideuma.

Effectively, Pound liked the paideuma concept because Frobenius had conceived of three paideumas: (P_1) general world culture, (P_2) entire populations as in nations, linguistic groups, heredity groups, etc., and (P_3) the function and development of the individual within the context and contours of the former two.

However, there are at least two contradictions, as I perceive them, in Pound's advocacy of Frobenius. The first exists on a semantic level and may only suggest a possible rift in operative definitions employed by Pound and Frobenius. Pound took paideuma to mean "gristly roots of ideas that are in action, and "the tangle or complex of the inrooted deas of any period." According to Frobenius, paideuma referred to "the tutorial essence of culture per se...culture [as] the tutor of mankind" (Fox 329). The etymology of the term has solely to do with education, pais as in child. Whether this has or Frobenius intended it to have anything to do with "ideas in action" deserves close attention. This, in combination with a second apparent contradiction in Pound's adoption of Frobenian ideas, could involve a divergence between Pound's theory and practice and that of Frobenius. Writing to his publisher, Pound asks T.S. Eliot to:

> Note that I shld. claim to get on from where Frobenius left off, in that his Morphology was applied to savages and my interest is in civilizations at their most. (Letters 336)

As I suggested earlier in this chapter, perhaps Pound used a concept of culture that was non-hermetic in order to handle concerns that were, in his view, strictly Eurocentric. Pound did have his priorities. In his rejection of "refined" expression in favour of the direct presentation, juxtaposition, and the ideogrammatic method, Ezra Pound affirmed the pre-eminence of direct perception which is neither archaic nor modern

but always present for consideration, and as motivation.

> it is not man
> Made courage, or made order, or made grace,
> Pull down thy vanity, I say pull down.
> Learn of the green world what can be thy place (Cantos 521)

But at most times and above all else, Ezra Pound was also a lover of fundamental order. His disappointments and brightest achievements testify to this unifying fact.

FROM POUND, TO OLSON

Charles Olson often attested to the things he learnt from Pound, who in his words had "freed the languages of the world" (Muth I 74). He acknowledged Pound as a formative influence, albeit at times with some reluctance. That Olson would hear of Frobenius through Pound should come as no surprise, since the German theorist and explorer is known to twentieth century English readers in general primarily due to Pound's interest in him. Any careful reader of Pound will encounter the advocacy and (no less important) the use of Frobenian concepts and materials. In his landmark essay on the Pound-Frobenius connection, Guy Davenport sums up in plain terms a typical reader's probable contact with Frobenius:

> Were it not for the high incidence of Frobenius in Pound's correspondence, the vigorous formal appearance of Frobenius's influence in Guide to Kulchur (loudly and gratefully acknowledged), the notes on him in the six Money Pamphlets, and his vivid emergence in The Cantos, particularly the Pisan group, Pound's discovery of Frobenius and the claim made for his wisdom...would be even more obscure than they are at present. (34-35)

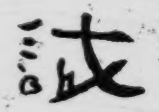
Nevertheless, it would be misleading for anyone to assume that Frobenius and Pound are identical in all, even most respects. When readers go exclusively to Pound for their culture morphology and

paideuma, a full understanding of Frobenius is impossible, just as attempting to view Pound's achievement as exclusively Frobenian would be pointless. There are adherences and divergences in Pound's use of Frobenian concepts. That Pound wanted a new civilization, a "new paideuma" cannot be denied, and that he attempted to construct such should neither be overlooked nor minimized. Put another way, Pound's own elitist conservatism may have limited his full appreciation of a Frobenian prime concern which was the truly liberal nature of culture morphology: "Culture is an independent organism. Man is not its subject, but rather its object or bearer. Man does not produce culture. Culture permeates man" (Fox 329).

If Pound could see that Classical tradition was not a living culture when deadened by the partitioning of orthodox compartments, he remained traditionalist enough to use the past as a standard to measure and evaluate the present. The rise of Europe generally formed the basis for his cultural conservatism. Much of his work can justifiably be seen as: "go back to the past, see how they did it. Then apply the lesson in careful and limited doses to yourself and your own situation" (Doria 130). Pound's time sense in most cases freed him from historic myopia, but it also allowed him the truly classical assumption that the poem itself could bring about a true order

the word is made

perfect



better gift can no man make to a nation (Cantos 454)

Upon meeting Pound in 1909, D.H. Lawrence had observed that, while his god was life, Pound's god was beauty. Pound's love of the beautiful is certainly beyond doubting; however, with the disaster of the war and what he came to see as a general semantic collapse, Pound increasingly gave over his goddess of beauty for the furies of sociology, economics, and bad politics.

More than a lover of beauty, Pound must be seen as a lover of order. For the poet who became foremost concerned with the errors of history there came a point in the century when notions of kulturkreise (circles of cultural influence) probably seemed of less moment than those of a kulturkampf (culture strife).[4] Here, then, is the salient distinction between Frobenius and Pound, one which becomes increasingly important as this discussion shifts toward Olson. To Frobenius, civilization was the gloss on the true organism of culture, which is and remains immediate and residing with those closest to the land. Considering cultures as functionally equal, Frobenius never spoke of superior cultures vs. inferior cultures vis-a-vis primitive cultures; culture could never be devised; and any movement away from the source was always in the direction of reduced vitality and dissolution.

Olson himself qualifies his original and careful praise of Pound's achievement with two pertinent observations: first, when Pound "razzle-dazzles History," he loses a true sense of morphology in the process, and secondly, an equally significant loss resides in his "admitted insistence [that] he will stay inside the Western Box" (Mayan 90). One might say that Olson was quick to see Pound's advances on the one hand, while equally ready to dismiss him as an apologist for the most repressive tendencies of Western thought on the other:

You wanted to be historic, Yorick.
Mug the mike with your ABCs
you even made Sligo Willie sneeze.
revolutionary simpleton
Ezra Pound, American.

. . . . . .

You are your own best witness.
These are not the great days.
No hunt, sir, and what you take for bays,
Propertius, are the rattle of cans.

. . . . . .

There is a court
where order, traitor
--you stood with the lovers of ORDER

. . . . . .

The sentence reads: lover of the obscene
by the obscene undone

fecit, Pound, fecit (Encounter 3-5)

It must be understood that, for Charles Olson, at the point where we we take him up, Pound remained "the man of the century," in spite of his seeming loss of coherence and vitality (Muth I 129).

In the final days of 1945, just prior to his personal encounter with Pound, Olson wrote:

> Let us, then, in the world of our value, separate from the state, examine the work of Pound. He would be the first to stake his work as social in consequence. He is no poet to separate his poetry from society. He is a writer of purpose. ...Can any man, equipped to judge, find Pound other than a serious man? Can any writer honestly argue with those who shall, do call him a crank? It is no good, that business. Around his trial you will hear it again and again. Just one of those goddamned writers. They're crazy. A Bohemian. There are writers who are such, but not Pound, despite all the vomit of his conclusions. (Encounter 17-18)

Beyond all that Olson gained in reading Pound's work, there was soon to be what Pound gave to him personally. There was to be, among the rest, Leo Frobenius.

The Charles Olson Archives, presently housed at the University of Connecticut, contain a bundle of papers labelled "Pound Case." From among these documents which include poems, essays, notebooks and news clippings, a segment was brought together and published after Pound's death, according to Olson's wishes. From Charles Olson & Ezra Pound: An Encounter at St. Elizabeths (1975), as well as from Olson's correspondence and other archival material, we can reassemble part of the line of transmission that is presently under discussion: Frobenius, from Pound, to Olson. As early as 1945, Olson had noted in his journal that, "maybe Pound discloses to you a method you spontaneously reached for in all this talking and writing" (Olson 5 11).

Ezra Pound, spared trial for treason on grounds of mental illness, was confined to St. Elizabeths Hospital in Washington, "an isolation further enforced," writes Catherine Seelye, "by the antagonism which wartime broadcasts in Italy had aroused in former friends and fellow writers" (Encounter xv). Olson, for his part, had recently finished writing Call Me Ishmael; he had yet to begin his full activities as poet and teacher. His notebooks point to the fact that he was still finding out what his direction would be, having first put academia aside and then politics. With some ambivalence, Olson went to Pound, "to be of use if there is anything that could be done to save the scoundrel's skin" (xvi). Olson did not, perhaps could not, keep away. The visits took place over a period of two and a half years, regularly at first and then less often. The fruit of these meetings, or what interests us in the context of this thesis, can be seen in his journals and correspondence, and in Pound's efforts to have Call Me Ishmael

published. These facts are sufficient to underscore the significance of the encounter. A strong case for Olson's emerging itinerary is in the materials that will conclude this chapter. From them we even learn something of Pound, more specifically, what he saw and valued most in Olson--in fact, the most telling evidence we have of that recognition.

Although Pound spoke only reluctantly of his own work during their initial meetings, he appears to have been readily interested in Olson's study of Melville. Having touched upon the concerns of his book, Olson records Pound's response, which was immediate and striking:

> In answer to further questions, I said my book, Call Me Ishmael, was not getting anywhere with the publishers. Told him of the new deal [in] it. He suggested I send it to Eliot. . .
>
> we returned to America and I let go with my SPACE idea, indicating it was why I wanted to get this book out. I quoted the first line ["I take SPACE to be the central fact to man born in America, from Folsom cave to now."[2]], and went on to add I thought it was only the Indians, and not Pueblo or Navaho, but Aztec and Mexican Valley Indians that had done anything with the cruelty consequent to Space. At that Pound exclaimed: FROBENIUS! (45-46)

Whether it startled Olson or not, this may have been why he had come to Pound at all, what he had wanted to hear, what he needed to have--Ezra Pound's evaluation of his thought. Had Pound, at last, disclosed to him a method?

First of all, what Olson's notes do show is that he came upon the work of Frobenius via Pound. When the subject of the possible parallel between Call Me Ishmael and Frobenius was broached, Olson responded candidly, quietly acknowledging his ignorance of Frobenius apart from what there was in Pound:

> I said, I did not know his work, only as I had it from him, Pound. I did not know of any translation. He agreed and went on about some guy named Fox who had been translating but the war had come along and, I gathered, Fox had died. Later Pound spoke of the 30 volumes and spattered off the German title which I missed.

What matters is that the possibility of a link between space as drawn from Frobenian culture morphology and from his own analysis of the American experience of space made an immediate impression on Olson, who was at the time both keenly attentive to Pound's assessment and attempting to see his way out and away from Pound's direct influence. Perhaps, then, Pound had strangely provided him with the means for satisfying both ends. In this way, Olson's interest in Frobenius began its ascendancy.

> [Pound] just thought of a phrase: America, where people listen to Freud and not to Frobenius. He may be right. I must get hold of Frobenius somewhere. Maybe parts have been translated somewhere. (82)

So stands the initial phase of a tentative Olson-Frobenius connection, a phase in which Pound proved to be the go-between, but not, it needs to be said, the essential link. From this point on, we can see Olson approaching the work of Frobenius with increasing directness, with little or no reference to Pound, and with growing assurance that I take as evidence of a tacit affinity which Olson now fully intended to explore.

From this point on, there are hard facts to indicate that his curiosity moved Olson quickly and actively in pursuit of Frobenius as both a source of materials and methodology. My conjecture demands no more than presenting , where evidence permits, a sense of Olson's lively appreciation of Frobenius as developed during his encounter with Pound. By examining Olson's notebooks and correspondence of

the period, we can further trace the evolution of Olson's conscious investigation of Frobenian concepts while giving consideration to the uses to which he put them. The question that qualifies all of this is: would Pound's rapid gloss of Call Me Ishmael alone have been enough to move Olson toward an exploration of Frobenian ideas and materials as intellectual grounding had not Olson already been disposed toward such a connection? This seems doubtful, given Olson's stated intent to work through and beyond Pound. The close examination of Call Me Ishmael in Chapter Three will attest to the genuine, unprompted parallel between Olson and Frobenius.

By the middle of the 1946, Olson had established contact with an alive Douglas C. Fox, the former collaborator and English translator of Frobenius. In the surviving correspondence between between Olson and Fox, there is ample indication of the extent of Olson's growing ideas and enthusiasm. It is unfortunate that more of the letters, especially Olson's first letter to Fox, have not surfaced. Nevertheless, the first letter of the exchange (a response from Fox to Olson's missing first letter) does reflect some of the intensity that Olson seemed prepared to extend toward Frobenius, Fox, and their extant work, this at a time when Olson was urgently seeking a path and form for his own work.

If Fox must appear off-hand and detached in his response to Olson, it should be remembered that it was Olson in his enthusiasm who was in search of a form for his intellectual growth. Perhaps Fox's aloofness can best be understood as caution when faced with a unfamiliar degree of intensity:

> Thanks for your note. Yes, Erythraea is second to Paideuma. Many would probably find it the more

> interesting of the two because of the rock pictures. The MS [sic] you refer to is Schicksalskunde. Translated it in '34 before I had a proper command of the language. ...You will see it eventually if and when I can find it.[5]

As we can infer from Fox's letter, Olson had approached him armed with at least three suggestions. First, he sought the immediate reprinting of the Fox summary of Frobenian paideuma theory found in the New English Weekly articles:

> You may not find the N.E.W. articles worth republishing. ...At any rate I'd like to look them over first. Also I don't want to publish anything without knowing the rag in which it will appear.

Second, he urged further translation of Frobenius' Atlantis collection from which the African Genesis edition had sprung:

> Your suggestion about translating more of the Atlantis series and finally bringing out another volume is a good one and could be done eventually.

Third, there is some indication of Olson's more direct involvement, possibly as a transposer of myths, legends and folktales in Frobenian research and exposition:

> Heard yesterday from Katherine Cowen. She sensibly did not commit herself without knowing just what it is you had in mind....[G]et in touch with her stating what you are doing, what you intend to do and what you would like her to undertake.

By the next year, Olson approached Fox not simply with proposals but with work in hand stemming from close reading of Kabyl and Soninke tales found in African Genesis.[6] In his letter of 19 April 1947, Olson writes:

> Wanted also to get a permission of you. Finished the first draft of a piece last night which gives me a chance I have long waited for, to make what I take to be novel use of two of your tales, the Kabyl First Man, Woman and 50 Chillun and Gassire. I shall enclose on a separate page the opening of the article and the way I acknowledge you, in order that you may have a sense of the intent and present form of the

> piece. The Kabyl, due to the design, is condensed and somewhat rewritten, and Gassire I break up some at the beginning but from the partridge on use pretty much as you have so finely translated it....At the moment I am somewhat excited about the thing, for it is the first break in some of the things we talked about last year, and I have hopes more might follow from it. Do let me know any developments along these lines from your end.

Fox responded to this with a final letter on 28 April 1947 giving a copyright permission, but Olson's projects do not seem to have met with more than that. None of Olson's work mentioned here was published, and the manuscripts have since disappeared. The collaboration with Fox did not bear fruit, directly at least. So ends the second phase of the Olson/Frobenius connection, a phase marked by sustained research, letters of inquiry and encouragement, concrete proposals, and work in hand on Olson's part. This much was tendered by Olson before launching himself into independent ventures. This second phase need not be seen as an abortive venture but rather as preparation, especially in the light of a remarkable third phase to be touched on briefly here and developed more fully in Chapters Four and Five.

Olson's visits to Pound were in the meanwhile winding down. His journals record that Pound was anxious "to get on with things, his things, the 'serious'" (Encounter 103). In apparent loss of patience, Pound chastised Olson for his lingering inactivity:

> I thought you might be a serious character when I read that labor-saving device of yrs [sic] on H. Melville. But that was 2 yrs ago, bro.[sic].

Through it all, Olson was gradually moving toward a fluid sense of himself, his direction, and his work:

> The character of the resistance is this: I would rather be less than I dream myself to be & to be myself than any longer strive to be something each of these men [Olson's literary predecessors, or "fathers"] could admire. It's entirely possible I may have to fall way back behind what I might think

> (or they) I am capable of, in order to find my proper base. I have this feeling: that I can only come to have any feeling or directness by so doing. (xxiv)

All was not asleep within Olson. What drives my thesis now is the fact that, for a time at least, Olson came to see his work in Frobenian terms and as a non-Poundian exploration of those terms. The evidence is found in a singular document which outlines his plans for a major work as a follow up to Call Me Ishmael. Olson's outline speaks of what he calls "Operation Red, White and Black." The project is phrased in distinctly Frobenian language and is morphological in form and intent.

Outlining his thoughts for a Guggenheim Fellowship Proposal (which he was awarded), Olson leans heavily on Frobenian concepts for both his methodology and impetus in his second, morphological study of America, Call Me Ishmael being, according to Olson, the first. Conscious now of a method he had previously intuitively worked toward in his Melville study, he writes:

> The book might be called the second on the morphology of the American kultur [sic]. It is difficult to give it a label. Viking calls it a book on the discovery of the West. It does concern the West but a more proper emphasis would be the differing ways the Indian, white [sic] the Negro found out how to shape a human society in the West. For my idea is to bring contemporary attention to bear on the land as a force in itself, and so to juxtapose the struggle of the three races with it, and with each other, that some lessons can be learned about the nature of our culture now.
>
> It has been my thought that the best way to do that is to tell some stories cut rigorously to fact about some figures who are not as familiar as the school books have made some others.... In any case the persons and events are, I think, archetype enough to disclose, by way of their facts, a fable valid and central enough. (Olson 5 32)

Olson wanted to base his work on a concept of culture as an evolving organism in tutorial contact with the land, a paideuma. Through

stories not unlike those told in African Genesis, Olson would begin with the Indian and then take on, as the land itself would, the movement of the white and black races:

> The Indian theme, because the Indian was the original creature on the land and, in the mind of the advancing white, a human image of the land is curled into all the narratives. A word more on them. We whites and Negroes are here less than 500 years. Since 10,000 or more years the Indians had worked out a life of varying degrees of order. I cannot, nor do I want to do a job of anthropology or sociology. But I want to take advantage of the work in these fields to move thru the book, as a ground base, stories from the Indians against which the white-Negro progress will be played. (33)

In 1948, Olson was awarded his second Guggenheim Fellowship (the first had been for Melville studies) for the proposed book on American culture morphology, studying the differing ways the Indian, European and African found to shape a human society in the American West. This vast project was never completed, but it led him on to other work and his pre-occupation with and use of Frobenius remained intact throughout the coming years. By 1948 also, Olson had for all intents and purposes made his break with Pound: "E.P. never in his life would have spent the years that Frobenius did pushing around Africa" (Encounter 103). This statement from the notebooks I take, when seen in the context of Olson's development, as a further sign of his shift of intellectual allegiance, away from his purely literary predecessors, among whom Pound was central, and toward what he would soon refer to as the new sciences of man.

In the exegeses of his first major poem, "The Kingfishers" (1949), Olson scholars have been almost unanimous in their esteem for the poem as a farewell to Pound, who had published the Pisan Cantos the year before. Guy Davenport has even called it a poem that effectively and

"decisively" divides the post-modern from the modern (Geography 82). Moreover, I submit that the poem, with its constantly shifting cultural terrain and attention, must stand as a tacit acknowledgement of the place of Frobenius in American literature and Olson's cultural space:

> I offer, in explanation, a quote:
> si j'ai du gout, ce n'est guere
> que pour la terre et les pierres
>
> . . . . . .
>
> this is also true: if I have any taste
> it is only because I have interested myself
> in what was slain in the sun
>
> I pose you your question
>
> shall you uncover honey / where maggots are
>
> I hunt among stones (Poems 92-93)

Primordial stones certainly, and by 1951 Charles Olson was at Yucatan, hunting among the Mayan ruins, looking into the eyes of the descendants of the ancient Maya, and calling out for anyone who is listening "come here leo fro benius" (Creeley V 103). But more on this in Chapter Four to follow.

Notes:

1. For a further summary of the "story of rock picture research," with Olson's marginalia of the same, see Chapter Five.

2. (a) Davenport quotes, from Decline of the West vol. 2, a statement of what Spengler considered most important in Frobenian research and theory:

> "We will consider the first stage as that of primitive Culture. The only field in which this Culture endured through to a second stage (though certainly in a very 'late' form) is found alive and fairly intact today in north-west Africa. It is the great merit of Leo Frobenius that he recognized this quite clearly, beginning with the assumption that in this field a whole world of primitive life (and not merely a greater or lesser number of primitive tribes) remained remote from the influence of the high Cultures. The ethnologist-psychologist, on the contrary, delights in collecting, from all over the five continents, fragments of peoples who really have nothing in common but the negative fact of living a subordinate existence in the middle of one or another of the high Cultures, without participation in its inner life" (qtd. in "Pound and Frobenius" 43).

(b) Although Davenport is correct in citing Jung as using Frobenius in The Psychology of the Unconscious and Essays on a science of Mythology, it is specifically Jung's collaborator Karl Kerenyi who was most taken with the Frobenian theory of paideuma, attempting to align the spatial dynamics of Frobenius with mandalic ones from Jung. See also Kerenyi's article on "Paideuma" (1938).

On the close connection between Jung, Kerenyi, and Frobenius, I offer the following case in point. When dealing with an unpublished Olson essay circa 1955 that begins "A MYTH IS THE RE-ARISING OF PRIMORDIAL REALITY IN NARRATIVE FORM," Don Byrd correctly identifies Frobenius as the source of its first principles (Byrd 98). However, what Byrd does not see is that the textual source of the Frobenian content of the essay is also in fact largely Jung and Kerenyi's Essays on a Science of Mythology, the connection being that close.

(c) The Poundian connection to Frobenius has been well documented by Davenport and others. I deal with it myself in Chapters One, Two, and Five. Suffice it to add here the following lines from Guide to Kulchur:

> The value of Leo Frobenius to civilization is not for the rightness or wrongness of this opinion or that opinion but for the kind of thinking he does (whereof more later).
> He has in especial seen and marked out a kind of knowing, the difference between knowledge that has been acquired by particular effort and knowing that is in the people, "in the air". He has accented the value of such record. His archeology

is not retrospective, it is immediate....
"Where we found these rock-drawings, there was always water within six feet of the surface." That kind of research goes not only into the past and forgotten life, but points to tomorrow's water supply....
When I said I wanted a new civilization, I think I cd. have used Frobenius' term.
At any rate for my own use and for the duration of this treatise I shall use Paideuma for the gristly roots of ideas that are in action. (57-58)

(d) As will be seen in Chapters Three and Four, Lawrence was an early reader of Frobenius, was aware of him by 1918, and showed at several points in his writing the lasting influence. See especially Studies in Classic American Fiction and the "Preface" to Fantasia of the Unconscious. For documentation of Lawrence's first encounter with Frobenius proceed to endnote 1 of Chapter Four.

3. In Guide to Kulchur as in the The Cantos, readers must deal with knowledge as the poet himself does, or as a culture morphologist might: a bit at a time, not as separate subjects but as parts of an evolving montage, parts of the ideogram. Morphological aims and methods fly in the face of existing categories that are found to be misleading and deadening. They did not respect any divisions where the facts called for none. When Pound quotes Leo Frobenius, "where we found these rock-drawings, there was always water within six feet of the surface," he comments, "That kind of research goes not only into the past and forgotten life, but points to tomorrow's water supply."

Since the aim of his work is a renovation of learning, Pound goes about his task by first taking the stuffing out of typology. "Does any really good mind," he asks, "ever 'get a kick' out of studying stuff that has been put into water-tight compartments and hermetically sealed?" Unlike Spengler, Frobenius had conceived of cultural death as a semantic depletion (as in materialism), the last phase in the cycle of culture, rather than an actual death in any apocalyptic sense. The movement was from myth and the creative impulses of early growth to the rigid logic, classification and hair-splitting of the final stage. A vital learning would not attempt to divide Greece, say, into the studies of Greece as art, thought, monetary custom, war, language system, etc. Why divide culture at all was the question being asked. This is the true meaning of the Guide, arrived at with Frobenius fully acknowledged throughout as forming the intellectual grounding behind all of the Poundian seeming non sequiturs, as in: "The one thing you shd. not do is to suppose that when something is wrong with the arts, it is wrong with the arts ONLY"

4. Pound perhaps sought to locate himself in a classical past and make of the present a mythological/personal history:

Parallels between the life and times of the Odysseus of tradition and the Odysseus of Pound emerge: the classical hero is made homeless by the aftermath of the Trojan War, the poet rendered culturally homeless by the cultural climate of America of the early 1900s. Both, in the absence

> of clear-cut authority (Odysseus adrift on the sea, Pound breasting the ideological tides between wars) play out their restless dramas of return and retreat from home. Yet both hero-Odysseus and Pound-Odysseus believe in their destiny, that the world will be a better place if only their actions and lives, the meaning of their actions and lives, will be accepted and believed by the world at large. Odysseus wants to return home to set his house in order; Pound to get back to a spiritual home to help set the Western World in some kind of just, humane and civilized order. We notice another classic motif at work here: mimesis. That is the notion that at given moments, "the hinges of time," we can repeat the lives or salient features of the lives of the great men and women of the past. A person, it was felt in antiquity, was most forceful when he feels [sic] himself and is seen by others to be living out mimetically one or the other of the great mythic patterns: Achilles, Helen, Hector, Penelope (Doria, 133).

5. Copyright of the University of Connecticut Library. See appendix for the full letter.

6. See Chapters Four and Five for crucial discussion of Gassire's Lute.

CHAPTER THREE: A PREDISPOSITION TOWARDS FROBENIUS

In 1945, Olson completed Call Me Ishmael, but the research behind this deceptively slim book of just over a hundred pages had started sometime around 1932. Olson received his MA in English from Wesleyan in June 1933, presenting a thesis entitled "The Growth of Herman Melville, Prose Writer and Poetic Thinker." At this point, Olson started to investigate Melville's papers and reading matter. Diligently tracking down 95 of the 124 books that now make up Melville's personal library, he had by the age of twenty-three brought forward the most notable elements of Melville's personal reading: these being volumes of Hawthorne which Olson passed along to F. O. Mattheissen, and of Shakespeare which he reserved for his own use. As a graduate student at Harvard, Olson eventually presented a paper to Mattheissen on the Shakespeare/Melville connection. The paper was reworked with help from Edward Dahlberg and appeared in the premiere issue of Twice A Year (1938).[1]

When a first version of a full length study was completed in 1939, it ran to over 400 scholarly pages. Upon reading it, Olson's then close friend and advisor counselled against publishing, and the work was temporarily shelved; Edward Dahlberg found its language and style "too biblical" and urged Olson to find his own voice (MUTH II 103). What later appeared in a 1945 version was the leaner substance of Olson's thinking on Melville--in effect, all that Olson had to say about Moby-Dick. The initial Shakespeare concerns were no longer central, although still evident in his concern for Melville's exploration of the psychology of evil, as seen in Ahab's monstrous pursuit of the white whale.

To paraphrase from Paul Christensen's excellent discussion of Call Me Ishmael, Olson is engaged throughout with the making of Moby-Dick, and careful to present the source materials that Melville drew on: the disaster aboard the Essex, his notes and research about that event, the close reading of Shakespeare, and the technical innovations that it provided Melville for the characterization of Ahab. Beyond that, Olson is attentive to the intellectual and emotional changes which came over Melville when the novel was complete. These are the facts and arguments that Olson attempts to see as a whole, much as any critic might. But, as Christensen quite rightly observes, Moby-Dick is not the true subject of Olson's book. America is.

The aims and concerns of Call Me Ishmael were atypical of the bulk of academic scholarship of the time. When he reviewed it, even Lewis Mumford remarked that Call Me Ishmael was "something of an anomaly":

> For though the author makes some use of his fresh knowledge, the work mainly follows the intuitive line of D.H. Lawrence and Edward Dahlberg, and the reader is forced to take or leave Mr. Olson's thesis without benefit of persuasion or scholarly argument. (qtd. in Charters i)

Coming to Olson's defence, friend and fellow Melville scholar, Merton Sealts, countered Mumford's criticism of Olson's work by observing that:

> As for being "intuitive," Mumford himself wrote at the highest voltage when he let his intuition go, except that he made the fatal error more than once of not starting with scholarship. Now he blames you for not stopping there. (Sealts 98)

Sealts and others quickly recognized and appreciated the audacious perspective in Call Me Ishmael, not to mention its brisk elliptic style that in no way betrayed a lack of scholarship (as we will soon see).

It was and remains a landmark in criticism.

Call Me Ishmael certainly bears and continues to invite our close scrutiny. From a scholarly point of view, its critical terms remain fresh and compelling. It is not an analysis of Moby-Dick based on philology alone, however much Olson may once have entertained such an approach and continued to employ Melville's reading in a larger context. Nor is Call Me Ishmael a placement of some ideological or aesthetic grid upon the Melville novel for the purpose of digesting what it might yield. Olson is clear from the start that his purpose in considering Moby-Dick is far more ambitious and fundamental:

> I am willing to ride Melville's image of man, whale and ocean to find in him prophecies, lessons he himself would not have spelled out. An hundred years give us an advantage. For Melville was much larger than himself as Ahab's hate. (13)

What these prophecies are stems from the "central fact" of Olson's approach to Moby-Dick—which is a fundamental experience of space (11).

The justification for reading Moby-Dick as a microcosm of America comes from Melville himself, as documented by Olson. Melville, as cited and underscored by Olson in Call Me Ishmael, perceived the function of genuine artists to be "part of their times; they themselves are the times and possess the corresponding colouring" (16). Melville's position was unequivocal, and Olson puts it to full use as his methodological focus. The organismic function of art is explored first through Olson's Whitman / Melville juxtaposition. He understands these two to be geniuses of their time, but where Whitman "derives" his colouring, Melville is "prospective" (qtd. in Sealts 103). It is by means of this Whitman / Melville dichotomy that Olson clarifies his advocacy of Melville's stance in consciousness and history.

"I take SPACE to be the central fact to man born in America, from Folsom cave to now," Olson writes (Ishmael 11). He defines space environmentally as the factor which is historically and culturally motivating:

> I spell it large because it comes large here. Large, and without mercy.
>
> It is geography at bottom, a hell of wide land from the beginning. That made the first American story (Parkman's): exploration.

Olson sees such artists as Whitman and Melville as the quintessential practitioners of space in the nineteenth century. Whitman and Melville had come to terms with their experience of space, each in his own way. In contrast to them, such writers as Poe or Hawthorne did not address the issues of frontier, although no less shaped by them:

> Some men ride such space, others have to fasten themselves like a tent stake to survive. As I see it Poe dug in and Melville mounted. They are the alternatives. (12)

Whitman was above all else the prophet of the democratizing trend of the Western world. Whitman, the enthusiast of the common man, is too easily epitomized at times as "absorbed in the exhilaration of escape" (Tuveson 129). But much of the time Whitman was so absorbed:

> All the past we leave behind,
> We debouch upon a newer, mightier world, varied world,
> Fresh and strong the world we seize, world of labour and the march,
> Pioneers! O Pioneers! (Leaves 194)

Because of this singing of democratic praises, the cult of elan, and youthful communion, without question the enthusiasm and the popular ethos of the time, Olson admits that:

> Whitman appears, because of his notation of the features of American life and his conscious identification of himself with the people, to be the more poet. (Ishmael 14)

It was not at all alone or without reason that Walt Whitman sang, and sang so loudly:

> Have the elder races halted
> Do they droop and end their lesson, wearied over there beyond the seas?
> We take up the task eternal, and the burden and the lesson.
> Pioneers, O Pioneers!

Nor was Herman Melville oblivious to these American, all too American perceptions, when in White Jacket, the novel preceding Moby Dick, he wrote:

> And we Americans are the peculiar, chosen people--the Israel of our time; we bear the ark of liberties of the world....We are the pioneers of the world; the advance-guard, sent on through the wilderness of untried things we feel in our souls, to break a new path in the New World that is ours. (qtd. in Tuveson 157)

But in contrast, Olson observes, Melville was generally "homeless in his land, his society, his self" (Ishmael 14). In a word, Melville was the more ambivalent figure. Nonetheless, Olson considers him to be the truer artist, the one with the deeper experience and capacity to speak of America's spatial push.

> Whitman we have called our greatest voice because he gave us hope. Melville is the truer man. He lived intensely his people's wrong, their guilt....The White Whale is more accurate than Leaves of Grass. Because it is America, all of her space, the malice, the root. (15)

If Melville tracks, as Whitman does, the ideals, the motives, and the conditions of the American people, he goes further, in Olson's view, because the metaphorical voyage of the Pequod is an outward arc of stolen liberties by a last frontier people.

For Olson, as for Melville, there can be no song of joyous space without the catharsis of a tale of vengeance: wreaked upon a wild sea

creature by an angry American captain. America's westward movement, the promise of her open frontier did not and could not automatically shift the country beyond the nasty realities of sectionalism, slavery, and paper democracy which, despite the rhetoric, failed to free the people from the domination of overlords:

> Melville raised his times up and he got them into Moby Dick and they held firm in his schema: e.g. his crew, a "people", Clootz and Tom Paine's people, all races and colours functioning together, a forecastle reality of Americans not yet a dream accomplished by the society; e.g. his job on the whaling industry, a problem in the resolution of forces solved with all forces taken account of: (1) OWNERS Bildad and Peleg (Aunt Charity interested party); (2) Ahab, hard MASTER; (3) the MEN, and TECHNOLOGY, killer boat, tryworks, and underdeck storage permitting four-year voyage. (16-17)

This explains Melville's painstaking attention to the prose of blubber. Says Olson, driving the message home, "if you want to know why Melville nailed us," you must, "consider whaling as FRONTIER, and INDUSTRY. The Pacific as sweatshop"(23). So much for the misty aura of pristine, virgin frontier--so much for the shining promise.

In Olson's view, Melville's work "is not fictive. He begins from, and proceeds by the method of observed reality" (qtd. in Sealts 104). This is the way in which Olson reads Moby-Dick: as embodying America, because Melville (as Olson understands him) said as much and not because he (Olson) would try to impose an external valuation on the novel for whatever extraneous purposes of literary or social criticism. Olson confidently proceeds to examine the novel as a text that illuminates the American condition of the mid-nineteenth century and beyond:

> I am interested in a Melville who decided sometime in 1850 to write a book about the whaling industry and what

> happened to a man in command of one of the most successful machines Americans had perfected up to that time --the whale ship. (Ishmael 12)
>
> From whaling, which America had made distinctly a part of her industrial empire, he took this "poor old whale-hunter," as he called him, this man of "Nantucket grimness and shagginess."...He made him "a khan of the plank, and a king of the sea, and a great lord of leviathans." For the American has the Roman feeling about the world. It is his, to dispose of. He strides it, with possession of it. His property. Has he not conquered it with his machines? The pax of legions? the [sic] Americanization of the world. Who else is lord? (72-73)

Just two years before his death, Olson said of his Melville book, "Ishmael is a great deal different than [sic] it ever seems to be taken" (qtd. in Charters ii). And what troubles me about various readings of Call Me Ishmael, including both Marxist and structuralist workings of it, is that they tend to downplay the primary significance accorded to space and movement in the book, not to mention Olson's thematic focus on the actions of Ahab and Ishmael as divergent responses toward space itself, unfolding as they do throughout the watery world of Moby Dick. When Christensen, for example, finds himself faced with the contrast of Ahab and Ishmael, he reaches for a questionable dialectic structure, rather than remain with the fundamental and unifying experience of space which Olson insists is so central to the novel. Given his penchant for a historical dialectic, Christensen can only extrapolate thereby and overstate both Melville's and (in consequence) Olson's meaning:

> ...the two characters and their polar attitudes come to represent for him [Olson] the tendencies that define the two ages he envisions colliding and struggling in the dialectic of history. (Christensen 41)

What historical dialectic as an ideological explanation passes over is the fact that nowhere, in either Moby Dick or in Call Me Ishmael, are

the characters Ahab and Ishmael in exclusive or ultimate conflict. They are simply present, on the bridge and before the mast, juxtaposed upon the sea, and quite distinct from one another--divergent human elements of a whaling tale. Moreover, their differences are contingent upon the same space. Captain Ahab seeks the facts of himself at sea through his hatred and meglomania: in contrast, the sea is where Ishmael seeks the facts of himself through an outward bound. The one predicates while the other is predicated by the sea. Consideration of a dialectic should not, it seems to me, be at the expense of how each character arises out of his immediate and radical spatial conditions. As Olson says:

> I am interested in a Melville who was long-eyed enough to understand the Pacific as part of our geography, another West, prefigured in the Plains, antithetical. The beginning of man was salt sea, and the perpetual reverberation of that great ancient fact, constantly renewed in the unfolding of life in every human individual, is the important single fact about Melville. (12-13)

Ignoring this experience of space, a concern for dialectic is but another sign of progressive Western abstraction, one more symptom of our loss of the Protean capacity for radical change which is the root value Olson brings forward in Call Me Ishmael:

> The son of the father of Ocean was the prophet Proteus, of the changing shape, who, to evade philistine Aristaeus worried about bees, became first a fire, then a flood, and last a wild sea beast. (119)

According to Frobenius (and Einstein too, for that matter), history is not truly dialectic unless it is both spatial and temporal in nature:

> The geographical shift which we can trace in every enhancement of culture (or *vice versa*) is in accordance with the paideumatic law that all temporal growth is connected with a movement through space. (Fox 16)

In a surviving letter to Douglas C. Fox, written in April 1947, soon after the publication of his study of Moby-Dick, Olson writes:

> Regret very much you are not here. Called, wanted to see you, to bring you a copy of my book, CALL ME ISHMAEL, just out. will hold until I hear from you, for one day I should like very much to have your analysis of the stuff on Space in it (written, as you may recall, before I knew of your work, and your colleague's).[2]

The meaning of this statement is clear. Olson has requested a Frobenian analysis of his Melville study, Call Me Ishmael. What must be kept in mind too is that his request for such a reading comes after Olson had familiarized himself with the Fox-Frobenius materials that were available to him. Conversant by then with the Frobenian concepts of paideuma and culture morphology, he was prepared to have his prior thinking evaluated by means of those criteria. We can reasonably assume that he would not have asked for it had he thought there were not grounds or connection. He was affirming Pound's initial perception that "space" as announced in Call Me Ishmael is akin to the space aspect of culture formation advanced by Frobenius.

There is no evidence that a Frobenian reading of Call Me Ishmael has ever been tendered (apart from Pound's: "FROBENIUS"). Such a reading falls naturally within the scope of this thesis, however. Sanction lies specifically in Olson's own request as demonstrated in the letter just quoted, circumstantially in the frequent appearance of Frobenius as a reference point in Olson's lectures and prose, and generally in the continuing need for a more inclusive and comprehensive approach to Olson studies.

A Frobenian perspective on Call Me Ishmael reveals that there are two Paideumas at work, that of Western history and another which is larger, less static, and more nebulous, if you will. Associated with Western history, the movement of the paideuma has been in a continuous westerly direction through progressive stages of mythology, religion, philosophy, and finally materialism.

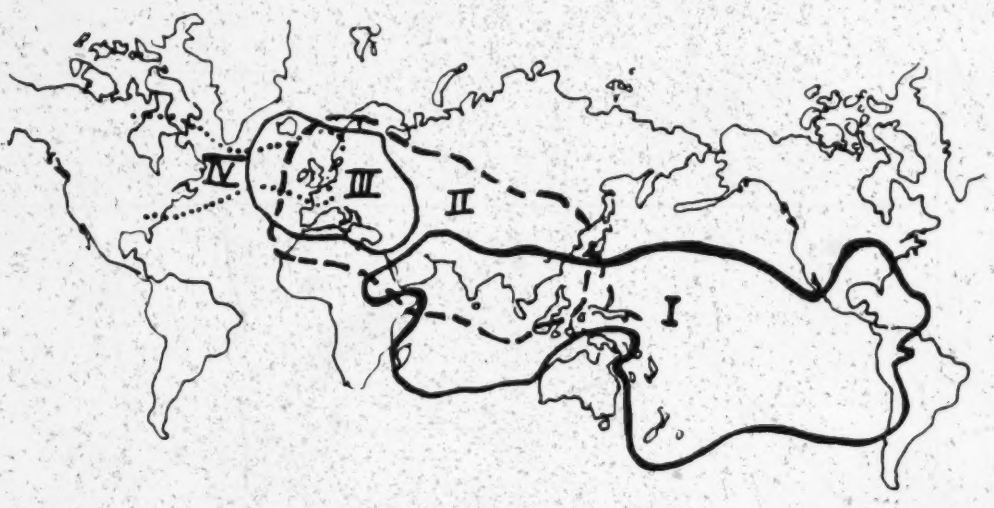


Figure 1:

Regions of Cultural Formation in their East-West direction: from (I) High Mythology, to (II) High Religion, to (III) High Philosophy, to (IV) High Materialism.[3]

In the creative childhood of mythology the human presence is an occurrence or a phenomenon of nature, no more no less. The youth of religion introduces the notion of destiny wherein man is favoured object, man as the son of God. The maturity of philosophy poses man as a critical subject of existence, the pensive centre. With materialization, or old age, come the actions of man as ruler of nature.

Table 1: THE PAIDEUMATIC STAGES OF HIGH CULTURES

1	2	3	4
			MATERIALIZATION (Old Age) Predominance of spatial tendencies, world economics, specialization, Machine Age, man "ruler of nature."
		HIGH PHILOSOPHY (Maturity) Logic, common sense, emphatic "I" feeling, man has become a critical subject of existence.	Philosophy articulated, no philosophy obligating, "History of philosophy," demetaphysi-cation of thought, "the free spirit," lack of connection.
	HIGH RELIGION (Youth) Anastrophe, man as son of God, favoured object of creation, highest transcenden-talism.	Religion articulated, state church, division of creeds, formation of sects, separation of art from religion.	Religion utilized, Bible criticism, liberal theology, religion a decoration for political ends, art "for the world," l'art pour l'art.
HIGH MYTHOLOGY (Creative Childhood) Spontanteity and isolation, "we" feeling, man as "Objekt des Geschehens," estate as "idea," nothing profane.	Mythology articulated, the profane enters the State, state for the utilization of power.	Mythology utilized (as a subject for artistic representation), state as a system of order.	Mythology worn out (material for scientific research), democracy the ideal of the weak state, state of social service, private means and political parties.

The senile and non-organic final stage of materialism can only devour all that has existed before: philosophy articulated but not obligating, religion utilized, and mythology worn out as mere data for science.

In Call Me Ishmael, Olson argues that Melville reached the peak of his creative powers at a time when America, or the extreme western edge of Western history, was in the throes of its burgeoning material expansion. Such was clearly the case. The years from 1790 to 1850 had seen tremendous growth in all aspects of America.[4] In population, the country had grown by five fold; in surface area, by three; in political structure, from a thirteen state seaboard to a twenty-nine state union spanning the continent; and, in economic terms, from a negligible internal market to one wherein the commerce exceeded export by three times. Moreover, American "sovereignty" had survived a second war with England, and the nation stood alone, in the minds of many Americans at least, as a unique shining light, after the set backs to the European democracies. A statue of liberty faced to the east, welcoming the newcomers, while the country itself raced westward. All of this, of course, had a combined and tremendous impact upon the thinking and expectations of Americans, in glowing visions of manifest destiny, and in the lucrative prospects of their perpetual westward movement.

As a Harvard doctoral candidate, Olson took a course given by Frederick Merk, who had worked to define and map a frontier approach to American history that asserted a claim for environment rather than ideology as the major historical influence. Exposure to Merk's ideas concerning the "Westward Movement" may have been crucial to operations

later contained in Call Me Ishmael (as it may to be to much of Olson's subsequent work).[5] One thing is certain, that the influence of Merk only lends credence to the argument for Frobenian parallels in Olson's thought from any early date. The spatial influence of the West, gauged pragmatically as its use by Americans, is central to Olson's proposition in Call Me Ishmael. He examines the impetus of Westward expansion by which Americans, as empire builders and colonizers, defined themselves. Merk's appraisal of the frontier directly pertains to our examination of Call Me Ishmael, helps to clarify it, and therefore deserves quotation

> The westward movement across the continent was not merely prolonged, but massive. It brought unaccounted millions from the Old World to the New, and from the shores of the Atlantic to the Pacific. It was the greatest migration of peoples in recorded history.
>
> It was magnificent in its achievements. It replaced barbarism with civilization. It unlocked the boundaries of nature to man's will and control....It helped shape American literature, sectional and national. It imparted emotional and spiritual values to successive generations. To them the open West was the land of promise, the Utopia of their dreams.
>
> Some aspects of the movement were less attractive. Conquest, speculation, exploitation, and violence were all part of this crusade into the wilderness. They were the harsher realities of the movement, and the source of the nation's present problems. They were a reflection of a society, dynamic, determined in the face of resistance, rising on successive frontiers from youth to maturity. (History 616)

Frederick Merk gave Olson a deglamourized American history, one of acquisitive gain by virtue of mechanized territorial expansion.

> The outcome of the Westward Movement was the conversion of a raw wilderness into a nation that was a world power. The process was unplanned, and could hardly have been otherwise. (xv-xvi)

Melville gave him the experience (both visceral and metaphysical) of space arising from and proximal to American exploitation and dominance.

> To Melville it was not the will to be free but the will to overwhelm nature that lies at the bottom of us as individuals and as a people. Ahab is no democrat. Moby-Dick, antagonist, is only king of natural force, resource. (Ishmael 12)

Olson hammers out the prophetic events of Moby Dick. America would come to the end of its overriding drive.

By insisting upon prosaic realities and, thereby, cutting through both false glory and optimistic duplicity, Melville had written his book out of the drive within his people:

> This Ahab had gone mad. The object of his attention was something inconscionably big and white. He had become a specialist: he had all space concentrated into the form of a whale called Moby-Dick. And he assailed it as Columbus an ocean, LaSalle a continent, the Donner Party their winter Pass.

In his exploration of Moby-Dick, Olson reconfronts his readers with the overreaching shape in their history and consciousness. American attention, the crowds seen by Ishmael before he sets sail, for which nothing would content except "the extremest limit of the land," had turned away from from the Atlantic (from its origins) and faced west--the willful virtue of the land drawing it on (Moby-Dick 94). One had only to read the newspapers to understand Ahab:

> From the time that the Pilgrim Fathers landed on these shores to the present moment, the older settlements have been constantly throwing off a hardy, restless and lawless population, which has kept in advance, subduing the wilderness and preparing the way for more orderly settlers who tread rapidly upon their footsteps. It is but a short time since Western Massachusetts, although now proverbially the land of "steady habits" and good morals, presented a population no ways superior to that of Texas at the present day. As their numbers increased, law and order obtained control, and those unable to bear constraint sought new homes. Those latter have rolled forward in advance of civilization, like the surf on an advancing wave, indicative

> of its restless approach. This is the natural, unchangeable effect of our position on this continent, and it must continue until the waves of the Pacific have hemmed in and restrained the onward movement. (New York Morning News, May 24, 1845)

In Call Me Ishmael, Olson succinctly identifies virtually all of the aspects of Western paideumatic growth and decline--

> In place of Zeus, Odysseus, Olympus we have had Caesar, Faust, the City. The shift was from man as a group to individual man. Now, in spite of the corruption of myth by fascism, the swing is out and back. Melville is the one who began it. (14-15)

--with the rider of a prospective Pacific resurgence which Frobenius had possibly also foreseen. When West finally becomes East, under the influence of the Pacific and Far East, the westward paideumatic decline into materialism will be, for Olson as for Frobenius, potentially subsumed. Perhaps Olson already had some global sense of this as early as 1938 when he noted, albeit rather more apocalyptically:

> When the World suddenly burst from the cincture of Homer's River Ocean, the West began, and California reached, it ended. What is going on now and shall go on until America is the late Roman Empire, is but a dying away. But while all this dies away, the new life is already opening: and Fascism is its first horrible beginning, god help us. (qtd. in Cech 67)

The push westward and the will contingent upon that direction might encounter its antithetical space. With the discovery of the Pacific, prefigured in the Plains, came the contrary spatial response from Melville.

Call Me Ishmael consists of five parts. Part One establishes Moby-Dick as the expression of the drive to subdue a continent and have space submit to will, the whaling industry being only a more conspicuous manifestation of that desire. Part Two concerns Melville's creation of Ahab, the cruel captain of industry, the man irrationally

capable of betraying all community to advance his sense of himself, the man incapable of perceiving order beyond his own use. In contrast to Ahab's actions is the emergent voice of Ishmael, of the open man of all-embracing consciousness. In the mythological context of Part Three, Ahab's passion is found to be primordial and evaluated as essentially blameless, his rivalry of nature simply a fact, a way of being human, but not the only one. Part Four presents a retreat from Melville's advance, Olson's step back into Melville's biography before embarking on the advance he forged in creating Moby-Dick. Part Five, entitled "Noah," traces the post-diluvian morphology of American culture wherein Ahab is curtailed by and Ishmael enters into space--as the Pacific Man. This was Melville's push into new paideumatic terrain.

Over the course of Call Me Ishmael's five parts, there is an evolution of perspective. Olson shifts from the materialism that is America's inheritance from Europe towards exploration of alternative mythological states induced by a new world experience of space. There is an eclipse of Western historical materialism and an entry into the potential of a new primary (primordial) existence. Again, there are but two major paideumas in Call Me Ishmael. Olson sketches the movement from one to the other: from Western "world history" to what might be termed the super-temporal or "post-modern" condition. An eclipse of materialism is brought about by the new experience of space by a "last first people." Olson sees Melville as the first American to fathom and document this spatial apotheosis. The movement from cultural region IV to V, as Olson sees it, was Melville's extension of the West.

Figure 2

Regions of Cultural Formation in their East-West direction: from (I) High Mythology, to (II) High Religion, to (III) High Philosophy, to (IV) High Materialism; (V) Supertemporal or "Post-Modern" [6]

Olson reads Moby-Dick as myth. It is a myth of changing shape: a morphological myth wherein a world is re-established. In the myth world of Moby-Dick, a world large enough to encompass Ahab's hate, there is only love and death. Love and death are temporal aspects of space. Love is the movement of those seeking facts for and of themselves in space. Death arises out of attempts to create order among the relations of things in ways which are unaccountable to space. The increasingly ideological abstraction of Western thought is one form of death. Ahab is a full stop, a figure that can no longer be explored. Ishmael is a figure responsible to more than himself; he is prospective and ready to be explored.

To reiterate Olson's thesis in Frobenian terms, he discloses that with Moby-Dick Melville had journeyed back to the paideumatic roots of

culture nurtured in the raw and open apprehension of time and space:

> Space and time were not abstraction but the body of Melville's experience, and he cast the struggle in their dimension. (Ishmael 84)

Olson's principal assertion throughout Call Me Ishmael is that Melville had discovered, and not devised, a way out of the Western box:

> Melville had a way of reaching back through time until he got history pushed back so far he turned time into space. He was like a migrant backtrailing to Asia, some Inca trying to find a lost home. (14)

That global conditions now exist perpetually makes of everyone a "last first people," unless we continue to forget, act big, and misuse our land and ourselves. The myth of Moby-Dick speaks of and for what is primary. Olson asserts that "Melville went back, to discover us, to come forward. He got as far as Moby-Dick."

> Logic and classification had led civilization toward man, away from space. Melville went to space to probe and find man. Early man did the same: poetry, language and the care of myth, as Fenollosa says, grew up together.

In space Melville placed not one figure but two. It is Ishmael who stands apart from the death-in-life of Ahab's existence. Ahab "invokes his own evil world" rather than looking for meaning and sustenance in what exists (53). He is "Conjur Man," a magician who seeks dominance at the peril of everyone and everything around him. Ahab is not the only form of human will in Moby-Dick:

> Melville's "wicked book" is the drama of Ahab, his hot hate for the White Whale, and his vengeful pursuit of it from the moment the ship plunges like fate into the Atlantic. It is that action, not the complete novel Moby-Dick. The Moby-Dick universe contains more, some thing different. Perhaps the difference is the reason why Melville felt "spotless as the lamb." (54)

As Olson points out, there is also Ishmael, the survivor, whose narrative frames Ahab's action. Ishmael, "able to dive into the

blackest gorges and soar out to the light again," is a figure of negative capability:

> He is passive and detached, the observer, and thus his separate and dramatic existence is not so easily felt ....When he alone survived the wreck of the Pequod, he remained, after the shroud of the sea rolled on, to tell more than [my underlining] Ahab's wicked story.... By this use of Ishmael Melville achieved a struggle and a catharsis which he intended, to feel "spotless as a lamb." (58)

To acquire the lost dimension of space, Ahab had declared himself "a rival of earth, air, fire and water" (85). In contrast, Ishmael declared himself an equal mystery to and participant in elemental life.

Melville was larger than Ahab's hate, and Olson identifies with that larger portion. "Call me Ishmael," his title asserts. He laments that the sense of life and death which Melville obtained through his experience of space on the Pacific was "lost" in his subsequent return or capitulation to religion: "Christ's slide of future life deflected Melville's sight of past" (101). Yet what Melville had done could not be undone. He had been born again on the Pacific, and his experience of space was both a "comprehension of PAST," and a "confirmation of FUTURE"

> The Pacific taught him how to repeat great RITES of spring. The unceasing ebb and flow took him into a patrimony of Past....It was in meadows of brit he found his seed. (114-116)

Olson understands Moby-Dick as a prospective work for a prospective people. With the discovery of the Pacific, the deductive premises and exclusive claims of Western history went overboard--

> I said 3000 years went overboard in the Pacific. I was going back to Homer. The evolution in the use of Ulysses as hero parallels what has happened in economic history. (117)

--and among the gains is access to the myth world that had ended, not begun with Homer:

> Homer's world was locked tight in River Ocean.... But in the Odyssey Ulysses is already pushing against the limits, seeking a way out. Homer gave his hero the central quality of the men to come: search, the individual responsible to himself. (118)

The temporal movement of the individual responsible to himself ends when he discovers in himself that West meets East.

Independent of each other, Frobenius and Olson trace the historic movement of culture as a gradual decline from a mythological intensity based on unencumbered perception and participation toward a mechanized systematization based on techno-economics. Together they foresee a turning point in paideumatic orientation taking place on a global scale. The Frobenian perspective in Call Me Ishmael reveals that there are the two Paideumas in play, that of Western history and another which is both larger and less defined (more nebulous). Associated with Western history, the movement of the paideuma has been in a continuous westerly direction through the progressive stages of mythology, religion, philosophy, and finally materialism. With the unbridled expansion of materialism "with its means of communication and transport and the demands of commerce and finance...the entire globe is enveloped by these manifestations of a pragmatic and mechanistic age" (Anthology 53). The gain of materialism, as Olson sees it, is that with its global triumph new conditions have arisen:

> The third and final odyssey was Ahab's. The Atlantic crossed, the new land America known, the dream's death lay around the Horn, where West returned to East. The Pacific is the end of the UNKNOWN which Homer's and Dante's Ulysses opened men's eyes to. End of individual responsible only to himself. Ahab is full stop. (Ishmael 119)

Frobenius sees the new conditions of culture as final and "marked by a harmonious blend of the daemonic, the ideal and the actual." Our primary creative energies find expression alongside our idealism and intellectual purpose. At this "phenomenalistic" stage, the false focus, or the episodic aspect of history are done away with and our sense of time evolves into that of the supertemporal (Anthology 54).

> The organic character of culture unites tectonic with monumental features, ideas with practical effect and facts with a conceptual content. As a result, we receive flashes of enlightenment which continue to inspire the mind and will gradually obliterate the differences of method that are still customary in approaching "primitive" and "historic" cultures respectively. This means it will be possible to make scientific study of the whole of human culture from its first beginnings, as an organic unity. (55)

If Ahab was full stop, then Ishmael was the new beginning--the orphan, the survivor and root person in root place. In a text written in the early 1950s, Olson made a thorough assessment of what exactly he had achieved in Call Me Ishmael by shifting attention from Ahab to Ishmael. Defining "THE AREA, and the DISCIPLINE of, TOTALITY," Olson writes:

> It started, for me, from a sensing of something I found myself obeying for some time before, in Call Me Ishmael, it got put down as space, a factor of experience I took as of such depth, width, and intensity, I insisted upon it as fact (actually tried, there, to bring it down out of the abstraction of the word of it and away from the descriptive errors of it I was then capable of--American geography, pre-history, and by way of a test case, Melville, proto- or archeo-culture--by telling three sorts of stories, by setting in alongside the abstractions and the analogies three documentary narratives which I dubbed FIRST FACTS, to give space, by that noun, and those narratives, the mass and motion I take it to have, the air that it is and the lungs we are to live in it as our element.
>
> I knew no more then than what I did, than to put down space and fact and hope, by the act of sympathetic magic that words are apt to seem when one first uses them, that I would invoke for others those sensations of life I was small witness to, part doer of. But the act of writing the book added a third

> noun, equally abstract: stance. For after it was done, and other work in verse followed, I discovered that the fact of this space located a man differently in respect to any act, so much so and with such vexation that only in verse did I acquire any assurance that the stance was not in some way idiosyncratic and only sign of the limits of my own talent, only wretched evidence of the lack of my own engagement at the heart of life.
>
> But the mark of life is that what we do obey is who and what we are. And we have no other recourse than to see what we do as evidence of what we are, and use it, for good or worse, (1), to make more use of what we obeyed in the first place, and, thereby (2), continue the pursuit of who we are (which pursuit seems to me now only a permanent one, if the only one of men so inclined). (Olson 10 96)

This statement leads consideration of Olson's cultural engagement into its next phase. Comprehending the range and scope of what Melville had done in writing Moby-Dick, Olson turned to what Melville did not do.

Notes

1. See Merton Sealts, Paul Christensen, John Cech, et al. for further background on these matters.

2. Copyright of the University of Connecticut Library. See appendix for the full text of letter.

3. Figure 1 is adapted from Vom Volkerstudium Zur Philosophie, published as volume 4 of Erlebte Erdteile. Frankfurt (1929) pp. 300-301.

4. Summary of demographic, political, and economic expansion obtained from David Potter. Impending Crisis 1848-1861. New York, 1976.

5. See Olson's "Bibliography on America for Ed Dorn" Additional Prose, pp. 7-8. For commentary See also: Ralph Maud, "Merk and Olson," Athanor 2 (1971): 49-51.

6. Figure 2 is my extension, according to Melville and Olson, of Figure 1, the addition being that of the Pacific, the "post-modern" or supertemporal.

CHAPTER FOUR: FROM CULTURE MORPHOLOGIST TO POET

Take it large or small, a "post-modern" art must take the Earth as one. The distant becomes near, and the historically remote becomes immediate and available: "what is," Olson writes, "is no longer THINGS but what happens BETWEEN things, these are the terms of the reality contemporary to us--and the terms of what we are" (Human 123). Olson saw D.H. Lawrence as one artist who had finally taken the world in large terms; who was, among the Moderns, "the only one...who stood there, getting it, as his own" (Mayan 84). Lawrence, with Melville, is Olson's prototype of artist as morphologist. In his bibliography for Mayan Letters, Olson places Lawrence alongside Frobenius, citing the preface to Fantasia of the the Unconscious as a seminal text for background to Olson's own poetic engagement. If lacking in the erudition that so often stifles more learned men, Lawrence had, in Olson's view, managed to proceed on his own rhythm of insight, a "swoop of a bend impinging centripetal towards the centre" thrusting deep into the past for verities and relevance. The preface to Fantasia, "where he imagines states of being & geography divers from the modern," best illustrates the dynamic geo-cultural vista that Olson felt to be opening up in our knowledge and sense of the world (Mayan 88). Lawrence writes

> Only let me say, that to my mind there is a great field of science which is as yet closed to us. I refer to the science which proceeds in terms of life and is established on data of living experience and sure intuition. Call it subjective science if you like. Our objective science of modern knowledge concerns itself only with phenomena, and with phenomena as regarded in their cause-and-effect relationship. I have nothing to say against our science. It is perfect as far as it goes. But to regard it as exhausting the whole scope of human possibility in knowledge seems to me just puerile. Our science is a science of the dead world. Even biology never considers life, but only mechanistic functioning and apparatus of life.

> I honestly think that the great pagan world of which Egypt and Greece were the last living terms, the great pagan world which preceded our own era once, had a vast and perhaps perfect science of its own, a science in terms of life. In our era this science has crumbled into magic and charlatanry. But even wisdom crumbles....
>
> In the period which geologists call the Glacial period, the waters of the earth must have been gathered up in a vast body on the higher places of our globe, vast worlds of ice. And the sea-beds of today must have been comparatively dry. So that the Azores rose up mountainous from the plain of Atlantis, where the Atlantic now washes, and the Easter Isles and the Marquesas and the rest rose lofty from the marvellous great continent of the Pacific.
>
> In that world men lived and taught and knew, and were in one complete correspondence over all the earth. Men wandered back and forth from Atlantis to the Polynesian Continent as men now sail from Europe to America. The interchange was complete, and knowledge, science was universal over the earth, cosmopolitan as it is today. (6-7)

When conditions change, structures of civilization too might be watered off, altering landmarks, creating unfamiliar distances, fragmenting the old established patterns. What remains is "remembered as ritual, gesture, and myth-story." Lawrence had read Frobenius early [1]

Olson, along with Lawrence, saw that at present artists have only the self as force to discover what other forces impinge and are thus relevant. My argument until now has been that, predisposed toward, and with access to, methods and materials derived from Frobenius, Olson effectively raised them up and extended their use. I take this to be fundamental rather than incidental to an understanding of the art that Olson began to elaborate in the late 1940s and early 1950s. In his capacity as a poet and educator, Olson pushed culture morphology and paideuma in the direction of a "post-modern" poetic and practice with vast cultural implications.

In 1950, Olson wrote an autobiographical piece which he called "The Present is Prologue," wherein he nominates his artistic place and function as that of "archeologist of morning," or a cultural beginner interested in beginnings. He allows for no separation between himself and those forms which he studies, regardless of the apparent distances.

> Now, I spend most of my time studying the Sumerians and Mayans, transposing the poems and the inscriptions they left. The will to cohere in both these people is what I see in us now. I do not mean collectivism, though I am not at all so uncomfortable in the face of it, and of quantity, as those of my contemporaries seem to be who are stuck with the old soul, and quality, and who back up, for sanctions, to those walls which have been a comfort for man in the East and West since 1500 B C (The American Indian lies outside that comfortable box just as much, I'd argue, as the Americans now do. I meant it, in Ishmael, that we are the last first people.)
>
> Therefore I find it awkward to call myself a poet or a writer. If there are no walls there are no names. This is the morning, after the dispersion, and the work of the morning is methodology: how to use oneself and on what. That is my profession. I am an archeologist of morning. And the writing and acts which bear on the present job are (I) from Homer back, not forward; and (II) from Melville on, particularly himself, Dostoevsky, Rimbaud, and Lawrence. These are the modern men who projected what we are in, who broke the spell. They put men forward into the post-modern, the post-humanist, the post-historic, the going live present, the "Beautiful Thing". (Prose 40)

An archeologist of morning employs a methodology that consists of "how to use oneself and on what." Evident in his activities circa 1950 are Olson's answers to the questions of "on what" and "how" to use himself.

Stepping outside the "comfortable box" of Western history is the "post-modern" act. Much of the work involved is necessarily pre-literary. In early 1951, Olson would go to the Yucatan, to live and study among the Mayans, not as a scientific specialist, but instead as a working poet. It is essential to note that his poetic engagement

should lead him into what Robert Creeley has called an "altogether rare instance of culture morphology at work," insisting on the full complex of attentions in order to prove that "no art can sustain itself free of a basic human contact" (qtd. in Butterick & Glover 9). Creeley speaks of culture morphology because it was much on Olson's mind at the time. As seen through his intense correspondence with Creeley and Cid Corman, his welter of essays, and his initial poems, Olson was trying to make clear his cultural stance as an artist. In response to Olson, Creeley would reiterate that art can be "the field of any man's attempt to get to that prime [i.e. whatever force or condition] he constitutes, to make just that the substance of his art" (Creeley IV 79). Olson was in the Yucatan to fully attend to culture morphology but also, and more significantly, to explore his own place within that morphology. This he felt was the special domain and function of the artist.

Throughout Olson's sojourn in Yucatan, his letters to Creeley and to Corman, editor of the newly launched Origin, speak repeatedly of the value and currency of Frobenius' work. At one point, Olson simply blurts out "come here, leo fro benius" (Creeley V 103). He again calls for the complete reprinting "of Douglas Fox's summary of Frobenius' whole position" (139). He proposes an exposition of Mayan glyph stones in the style of the Frobenian "cave art" show at the Museum of Modern Art. Since Olson continued to push for the availability and the validity of Frobenian materials and concepts, it more than suggests that he was still using them. And if he could not entirely fill the Frobenian shoes, he was at least attempting similar work.[2]

Olson approaches Yucatan in a manner similar to that which he proposed, in "Projective Verse," as the poet's approach to the poem:

> The objects which occur at every given moment of composition (of recognition, we can call it) are, can be, must be treated exactly as they do occur therein, and not by any ideas or preconceptions from outside the poem, must be handled as a series of objects in field in such a way that the series of tensions (which they also are) are made to hold, and to hold exactly inside the content and the context of the poem which has forced itself, through the poet and them, into being. (Human 56)

The attention of the culture morphologist could meet with the entire undetermined shape of experience. With scholarly research certainly, but also sentient and unassisted, Olson tries to function as a physical and sensory capacity brought to bear on the field before him. He wants to explore Yucatan without a generalizing humanism, and without a notion of himself as objective observer, without the false scientific perspective afforded by specialization. As a poet, then, he explores Yucatan with the senses and curiosity that can alone determine what might be available to him. All this is necessary before a poem need be written

> I have been in the field, away from people, working around stones in the sun, putting my hands into the dust and fragments and pieces of those Maya who used to live here down and along this road. (Creeley V 24)

Olson was in Mexico during the first half of 1951, after which time he moved on to teach what he termed these "new sciences of man" at Black Mountain College.

The Mayan Letters are a collection gathered from Olson's letters to the poet Robert Creeley, who was his correspondent and the eventual editor. Mayan Letters was Olson's next monograph after Call Me Ishmael and similarly can be read as culture morphology. But where Call Me Ishmael was a book consistently focussed on the morphologic perception of "an end" to the West, Mayan Letters documents Olson's more haptic

investigations of alternatives to inherited culture. It is a book in which the "poet's technique" is brought to bear on a people and place (88). The historical/geographical/cultural context of the Maya is of crucial interest to Olson because it reveals to him human form of unrivaled coherence and size:

> That is, the gate to the centre, was here, as accurate as what you and I [sic] have been (all along) talking about --viz., man as object in a field of force declaring itself as force because is force in exactly such relation & can accomplish expression of self as force by conjecture, & displacement in a context best, now, seen as space more than as time....which, I take it, is precise contrary to, what we have had, as 'humanism,' with, man, out of all proportion of, relations, thus, so mis-centered, becomes, dependent on, only a whole series of 'human' references which; so made, make only anthropomorphism, and thus, make mush of, any reality, conspicuously, his own, not to speak of, how all other forces (ticks, water-lilies, or snails) become only descriptive objects in what used to go with antimacassars, those, planetariums (ancestors of goldfish bowls) etc. (67)

There is no abstractable outcome from these Mayan researches. The point of it all is discovery.

In a Mayan Letters postface, Olson distinguishes between various approaches to the study of culture: 1. the respectable and uninspired, 2. the less respectable but stabbing at value, 3. the intimate contact (ethnography), and finally the "poet's technique" which differs from the others as an entire "disposition to reality" (88). Olson does not share many common priorities with the specialists; his and their methods are at cross purposes throughout his venture into Yucatan:

> Here I am an aestheticist (which I have yet to be convinced any of them, from Stephens on down, is). And now, when they, these professionals, are catching on (EP's 35 yr lag, surely), to the validity of the total life of a people as what cargo art discharges, I am the one who is arguing that the correct way to come to an estimate of that dense & total thing is not, again, to measure the walls of a huge city but to get down, before

> it is too late, on such a flat thing called a map, as complete a survey as possible of all, all present ruins, small as most of them are. (14)

As a culture morphologist, Olson saw the necessity of remaining a working artist--alive to the structures of creation rather than collecting the specimens of history. To express what he intends by "poet's technique," Olson alludes to a standard of artistry that he extends from Homer back, and from Melville on (i.e. in paideumatic terms, back into mythology and ahead into what I have been calling the "post-modern," or perhaps what Frobenius calls the "supertemporal") Olson is insistent that the total, subjective, on site involvement of the artist is essential for bringing the remote past forward. Unlike specialists "trained" in ethnography, archeology or linguistics, the artist uses himself as a coherent force in a field of force with nothing to maintain the field as form apart from the precisions proper to him. Considering the options for prolonging his researches in Yucatan, Olson writes to Creeley:

> So far as I can see it, my only hope would be to convince one of these professional Maya outfits in the States that what I am doing would pay-off, to them, in some form or other. Which, it still strikes me, is small chance, they are so backward in admitting culture-morphology as a discipline (my premise being, of course, that only a poet, now, can be said to possess the tools to practice culture morphology at its best (& its highest heat). But who'll buy that posy, except thee & me? (Creeley V 88)

While Olson worked hard and received a Wenner-Gren Foundation grant to continue his study of the Mayan hieroglyphs, it would be wrong to assume that his concerns and attentions were becoming exclusively New World: "my method has always been to put around any such core the full picture of culture, both where it came from and where it dispersed" (Alcheringa 110). Frobenius had provided the concept that

no people on earth have their "own" culture, but that all cultural developments are attendant upon the richness of stored stimuli and the organic capacity to assimilate new increments. Kulturkreises, or culture circles, be they mythological, religious, philosophical, materialist, or "supertemporal" are energetic points of origin, not points of accumulation. Dispersion and migration play a large part in both Frobenian research and Olson's archeology of morning.

Olson's initial essay for Origin had focussed on the antithetical forms of will demonstrated, in his view, since Mesopotamia. The significance of "taking the Earth as a One," as he would later remark, is that the act thereby "produces a one" (Muth I 67). Concurrent with his Mesoamerican researches was Olson's application for a lectureship and residence at Teheran University in Iran. His application for a teaching post states that the importance of pushing his studies of civilization in America back to its points of origin led him to questions about the development of methods to investigate the origins of civilization generally. As a look backward into America had led him to the Mayan glyphs "as a valuable core to investigating morphology of culture," so too, Olson asserts, a look backward into Western civilization must stem to the Caucasus Mountains and the Mesopotamian Valley (Alcheringa 111).

Olson's purpose in wanting to see and spend time in the East is twofold. Firstly, he wishes to steep himself directly "in all aspects of SUMERIAN civilization (its apparent origins in the surrounding plateaus of the central valley, the valley-city sites themselves, the works of them, especially the architecture and the people's cuneiform texts)" (111). He has already begun a similar study of Mayan land, people, and

art. Secondly, and more significantly, Olson intends to juxtapose the Sumer and the Maya. He proposes to do so in book form

> to fasten--by the live sense that only the actual ground gives--the text of a book, one half of which is SUMER (the other half is the MAYA, and the intent in putting these two civilizations together is to try to make clear, by such juxtaposition, the nature of the force of ORIGINS...
>
> The further intent is that such a study throw a usable light on the present, the premise of such a study being that the present is such a time, that just now any light which can lead to a redefinition of man is a crucial necessity, that it is necessity if we are to arrive at fresh ground for a concept of humanism.
>
> ...such a method of juxtaposition as described above cuts across 'classified' history and demands, as these other methods [Toynbee's or Spengler's] do not, both the substance and the forms of art, and their examination by a man who is a practicing artist himself, a 'professional' in the arts as signs of the culture.

The advantage of such a juxtaposition is that, in Frobenian terms, it would allow Olson to present the largest possible culture morphology from the beginning of the West in Sumer and back around to mythologic origins in Maya (see Figure 1 in Chapter Three). But what interests him most in culture morphology is not the historical systematization or even the extant shape of cultural forms so much as this "nature of the force of origins." He wants to know how people and places initially intersect. There is to be a book, similar to the Operation Red, White and Black but on a more complex geocultural scale. Both of these planned books may have been modeled on African Genesis, a scrupulous collection, itself a part of the much larger Atlantis series, of folk-tales gathered by Frobenius to illustrate the growth and unfolding of the African paideuma.

That Olson wanted these books to plot and juxtapose geocultural energies evident in art and language, people and place, is clear. But

again it must be remembered that he was first and foremost an artist intent on his own, his singular grasp of "the going live present, the BEAUTIFUL THING" (Prose 40). Alongside his research into the morphology of culture as a field in which to discover an alternate humanism or "contrary Renaissance," there is Olson's total and constant insistence that such must be defined by the solitary artistic figure:

> a Sumer poem or Maya glyph is more pertinent to our purposes than anything else, because each of these people & their workers had forms which unfolded directly from content (sd content itself a disposition toward reality which understood man as only force in field of force containing multiple other expressions
>
> one
>
> delightful fact, just picked up: that all Mayan jobs (sez Tatiana Proskouriakoff) are built around a single human figure, in all reliefs, etc.
>
> which is, of course, that ego which you, me, Mayan X were (are), he who is interested enough to, seeing it all, get something down. (Mayan 68)

What this ultimately comes down to is that Olson cannot make a big culture statement (writ large) unless that statement itself is lived out as part his own paideuma or stance.

***

Charles Olson began his "Human Universe" essay while still at work in Mexico. It was to be his third essay for Cid Corman's *Origin*, a "magazine for the creative," in which Olson was a major contributor (Origin 49). Olson acknowledged the essay as being the most complete statement of his cultural position, "the body, the substance, of my faith" (69). The essay arises directly from his geocultural engagement in Yucatan. It addresses the prospect and the demands of new forms of awareness that run contrary to the complacencies afforded by modes of cultural, intellectual, and artistic inheritance. Olson finds that the

"Greek means" of generalizing logic (as in Socrates), classification (Aristotle), and ideal forms (Plato), "have so fastened themselves on habits of thought that action is interfered with," and that a fuller participatory contact with the world has long been jeopardized (Human 4). "There are laws," he begins his essay, the fundamental law of human discourse being the identity of discovery and definition. Once this identity is severed, for whatever reason, reduction in the geocultural potential of the "human house" is the inevitable consequence. Again, he brings the matter home as individual engagement:

> It is not the Greeks I blame. What it comes to is ourselves, that we do not find ways to hew to experience as it is, in our definition and expression of it, in other words, find ways to stay in the human universe, and not be led to partition reality at any point, in any way. (5)

Underneath and grounding his concern for the widest possible cultural perspective, which his other contemporaneous prose explores as culture morphology, is Olson's shift toward a personal cultural stance which he refers to as the sentient "instrument of discovery and the instrument of definition" (3). In Frobenian terms, this is the personal paideuma, the individual condition which, in spite of the world, can only live through all the stages of itself. Or, returning to Olson's affirmative language, this is the one viable, indivisible stance toward reality, the single intelligence. Either way, the tutorial/cultural impulse of the human situation on earth is brought back to its basic unit.

"Human Universe" is an rigorous piece of rhetorical writing that moves confidently toward its value of "direct perception," tempered by Olson's engagement with the Maya:

> [M]en were able to stay so interested in the expression and gesture of all creatures, including at least three

> planets in addition to the human face, eyes and hands, that they invented a system of written record, now called hieroglyphs, which, on its very face, is verse, the signs were so clearly and densely chosen that, cut in stone, they retain the power of the objects of which they are the images. (7)

His praise for the Mayans is no mere exoticism but an elaboration of the results of his own researches in Yucatan. That the essay was meant for a "creative" audience in no way renders its message esoteric or remote. Olson establishes the intellectual, artistic, and cultural weight that distinguish acquisitive from inquisitive action with persuasive clarity:

> The process of image...cannot be understood by separation from the stuff it works on....In other words, the proposition here is that man at his peril breaks the full circuit of object, image, action at any point. The meeting edge of man and the world is also his cutting edge. If man is active, it is exactly here where experience comes in that it is delivered back, and if he stays fresh at the coming in he will be fresh at his going out. If he does not, all that he does inside his house is stale, more and more stale as he is less and less acute at the door. And his door is where he is responsible to more than himself. (10-11)

There is one allusive particular in "Human Universe" which has long puzzled me, however, and which presently serves to reveal what I find to be Olson's connection with Frobenius on another level. Until now, discussion has focused on the links between Frobenius and Olson on the level of cultural theory and methodology. There is no doubt that culture morphology and paideuma continued to be a part of Olson's theoretical understanding and apparatus throughout much of his work as a poet and educator, yet what should not be lost sight of is the fact that Frobenius was also a source of materials (materials of Africa and and of pre-history) which also had a profound impact upon Olson, an impact at least as great as Frobenian theory and methodology. Olson's "Human Universe" essay is subtly marked by such material, the fuller

significance of which reveals itself with some digging.

There is a short German phrase by use of which Olson concludes that, while the human universe is as discoverable and as definable as the other, "universe of discourse," it must be recognized that now the way there is non-existent, dead (4). Now is a time of beginnings because, Olson says, the way (or what has been) is dead. "Der weg stirbt" serves as an cryptic enticement to special study and further consideration (3). When deciphered, this tiny particular reveals the the comprehensive nature of Olson's geopoetic stance. He drops it twice, in "Human Universe," as a teasingly axiomatic reference point in a context where naked perception and new forms of individual expression are the means that might bring about a human universe:

> --the struggle does involve such labor and some terror--to wrap it in a little mystery: ah, the way is hard but this is what you find if you go it.
>
> The need now is a cooler one, a discrimination, and then, a shout. Der Weg stirbt, sd one. And was right, was he not? Then the question is: was ist der Weg?
>
> It is easy to phrase, too easy, and we have had enough of bright description. To say that in America the goods are as the fruits, and the people as the goods, all glistening but tasteless, accomplishes nothing in itself, for the overwhelming fact is, that the rest of the world wants nothing but to be the same. Value is perishing from the earth because no one cares to fight down to it beneath the glowing surfaces so attractive to all. Der Weg stirbt. (3-8)

A small thing, perhaps, and yet worthy of examination. The specific source reference for "the way dies" is not identified as such anywhere in Olson's published writings; and yet, it recurs throughout his early poems and prose. Chronologically, we run across it first in the 1948 Black Mountain lecture notes previously cited in Chapter One; the references continue in one form or another well into the 1960s.[3]

After some searching, I am confident that Charles Olson was consistently, even axiomatically refering to elements of an African folktale, one only recorded in German. Nothing definitive, but this was enough to make me think of Leo Frobenius as a transmitter of "der weg stirbt." In 1956, in a series of lectures on the role of mythology, later published as The Special View of History, wherein Olson again delineates a "single life" through the triad of "eros," "economos," and "ethos," the German phrase is partially identified:

> So, tonight, we shall be involved in tracing the powers of three powers each of us possesses; and which each of us,know it or not, are directed by, beholden to, and empowered by only if the accident of their success is properly attended to.
>
> I must throw in one last imperative—what I shall call LAW itself. And I mean it as the correct application of the old Western conception of The Way and the Eastern conception of the Tao (the Way is the path, follow me, etc. of Christianity, the "Law" literally of Judaism, etc. -the "light," say. Or, most excitingly for me, the African "Der Weg," as in the folk tale in which Der Weg stirbt--dies. (54)

Olson stipulates that his working notion of the disappearing path originates in Africa. Der weg stirbt is probably an abridgement of the following passage (my underlining):

> Nganamba starb nicht. Im Herzen Gassires fraB ein Schakal. Gassire sprach alle Tage mit seinem Herzen: „Wan stirbt Nganamba? Wann wird Gassire Konig werden?"...Der alte Mann sagte: „Ah! Gassire! Nganamba wird sterben....Du kannst mir nicht glauben: Dein Weg wird dich aber zu den Feldhuhnern fuhren. Du wirst ihren Schrei verstehen, und das ist dann dein Weg und der Weg Wagadus." (Atlantis V 54-55)

As was mentioned in Chapter Two, Pound had put Olson in contact with Frobenius' American collaborator on African Genesis. Olson soon urged Fox to continue with the translation of the Atlantis series of African folk materials. Olson even brought forward two transpositions

of Kabyl and Soninke tales in 1948 (see Chapter Two). His source for both was African Genesis. The folktale of concern here is "Gassire's Lute." It comes to us from the Soninke people of the Sudan who had long come to reside along the narrow grassland between the Sahara and the steppes of the Sudan. The Soninke epic, the Dausi, was reduced to mere fragments due to the passage of time, the influence of Islam, and a shift toward a more sedentary life in West Africa. According to Fox, "Gassire's Lute" is the most resonant fragment of what remains.

Olson not only transposed this fragment, he apparently also staged it twice, once in Washington and once at Black Mountain. In a recently compiled history of Black Mountain College, Jane Harris provides the following information regarding Olson's instructional activities circa 1949:

> ...Olson explored dance-drama forms on which he had been working the previous year in Washington. Olson was seeking an alternative to conventional narrative drama, which he considered "false" drama through a return to the primitive or ritual. Although a poem or verbal script established the theme, the meaning was revealed or evoked through the total performance, including voice, light, movement, and sound, rather than through an explicit expository text, character development, or plot.
>
> On August 28 and 29 Olson's class produced a program of Exercises in Theatre, which were staged in the dining hall on three platforms. The first exercise, Wagadu, was a narrative from the Soninke folktales collected in Leo Frobenius's African Genesis (1937), which had been dramatized as a ballet in Washington [Olson's involvement in "The New Company" with Frank Moore, et al]. At Black Mountain it was read as a chant by Olson with slides [of African rock paintings?] projected by Dan Rice and music by Pete Jennerjahn. (160)

It further confirms and adds to an understanding of Olson's ongoing engagement with Frobenian materials as he entered the 1950s. To this John Clarke adds that Olson related "Gassire's Lute" to him orally in

the early 1960s (see appendix). The question remains: exactly why was "Gassire's Lute" so interesting to Olson?

The tale seems to have been of value to Olson for the cultural dynamics and the methodology it contains. Their potential relevance for Olson is obvious, given the concerns he expressed in Call Me Ishmael. In terms of its narrative structure, "Gassire's Lute" is a composite of three parts: a chorus, the tale proper, and a final chorus, which is a repeat of the first. The tale records a context of people and place, and the loss of that bond. Migration has been the central fact of the people, the Fasa or legendary heroes of Wagada, who still dominate those around them but whose dominance is coming to an end. Their place or sense of centre, Wagadu, is about to be lost and this not for the first time according to the cyclic frame of the chorus:

> Four times Wagadu stood there in all her splendor. Four times Wagadu disappeared and was lost to human sight: once through vanity, once through falsehood, once through greed and once through dissension. Four times Wagadu changed her name. First she was called Dierra, then Agada, then Ganna, then Silla. Four times she turned her face. Once to the north, once to the west, once to the east and once to the south. For Wagadu, whenever men have seen her, has always had four gates: one to the north, one to the west, one to the east and one to the south. Those are the directions whence the strength of Wagadu comes, the strength in which she endures no matter whether she is built of stone, wood, and earth or lives but as a shadow in the mind and longing of her children. For really, Wagadu is not of stone, not of wood, not of earth. Wagadu is the strength which lives in the hearts of men and is sometimes visible because eyes see her and ears hear the clash of swords and ring of shields, and is sometimes invisible because the indominitability of men has overtired her and so she sleeps. (Genesis 97)

Olson notes on the coversheet of his copy of African Genesis that the Fasa historically originate north of the Sahara and migrated toward the Sudan, bringing their Wagadu with them. The city of Djerma is Wagadu I, Agadex is Wagadu II, Gana is Wagadu III, and Silla is Wagadu IV. The

fourth time, the legend tells us, Wagadu disappears from the earth, only to be found again in the human heart. The whole question and the continuing struggle of the Fasa to remain civilized is documented in this subtle tale of how and when the poetic figure comes into being.

Consider Olson's probable reading of this tale thus far. Parallels between the migratory condition of the Fasa and the migratory condition of Western civilization obviously exist. Having been transformed in a series of shifting incarnations, Wagadu devolves in a state of general dissolution; the common path has disappeared, died. The king or power centre is specified as "her last king" (98). There is not even the prospect of the transmission of power. The king, "Nganamba grew so old that Wagadu was lost because of him." (99) That the king will not die brings strife and stagnation which is, paradoxically, the death of the common life. Only the Dausi, the archai of all things, will outlive Wagadu in all its forms. How similar to Olson's interpretation of the condition of the West, in Call Me Ishmael. The West has come to a full stop, yet will not die. What next?

Gassire is the central and pivotal figure of the tale proper: a prince who finds that he cannot be king and that conditions rather than circumstances have denied him that position. He learns his fate is to become the bard. As Olson speaks of the tale in his letter to Fox, the portion of "Gassire's Lute" that most interests him is this process of becoming the bard, specifically that section of the text from Gassire's encounter with the partridges onward which signals the emergence of the poet:

> Gassire went into the fields. Gassire heard the partridges. Gassire went close to them. A partridge sang: "Hear the Dausi! Hear my deeds!" The partridge

sang of its battle with the snake. The partridge sang: "All creatures must die, be buried and rot. Kings and heroes die, are buried and rot. I, too, shall die, shall be buried and rot. But the Dausi, the song of my battles, shall not die. It shall be sung again and again and shall outlive all the kings and heroes. Hoooh, that I might do such deeds! That I may sing the Dausi! Wagadu will be lost. But the Dausi shall endure and shall live!
Hoooh! Dierra, Agada, Ganna, Silla! Hoooh! Fasa!

Gassire went to the old wise man. Gassire said: "Kiekorro! I was in the fields. I understood the partridges....Tell me whether men also know the Dausi and whether the Dausi can outlive life and death?" The old wise man said: "Gassire, you are hastening to your end. No one can stop you. And since you cannot be king you shall be bard....But you, Gassire, now that you can no longer be second of the first (i.e. King), shall be first of the second. And Wagadu will be lost because of it." Gassire said: "Wagadu can go to blazes!"
Hoooh! Dierra, Agada, Ganna, Silla! Hoooh! Fasa!

Gassire went to a smith. Gassire said: "Make me a lute." The smith said: "I will, but the lute will not sing....This is a piece of wood. You must give it heart. Carry this piece of wood on your back when you go into battle. The wood must ring with the stroke of your sword. The wood must absorb down dripping blood, blood of your blood, breath of your breath. Your pain must be its pain, your fame its fame. The wood may no longer be like the wood of a tree, but must be penetrated by and be part of your people. Therefore it must live not only with you but with your sons. Then will the tone that comes from your heart echo in the ear of your son and live on in the people, and your son's life's blood, oozing out of his heart, will run down your body and live on in this piece of wood. But Wagadu will be lost because of it." " Gassire said: "Wagadu can go to blazes!"
Hoooh! Dierra, Agada, Ganna, Silla! Hoooh! Fasa!
(Genesis 101-03)

"Gassire's Lute" is a tale of projective stature that summons special human qualifications. Human beings extend the dimensions of sound; they create language--poetry becomes their proudest act. From the workings of their own beings, their own breath in root obedience, projective acts spring. Gassire is the bard of kinetic processes, the receptive creature who is also an agent of a powerful creation. Olson

speaks in similar terms of the necessary, projective poetic figure:

> If he sprawl, he shall find little to sing but himself,
> and shall sing, nature has such paradoxical ways, by way of
> artificial forms outside himself. But if he stays inside
> himself, if he is contained within his nature as a participant
> in the larger force, he will be able to listen, and his
> hearing through himself will give him secrets objects share.
> And by an inverse law his shapes will make their own way. It
> is in this sense that the projective art, which is the artist's
> act in the larger field of objects, leads to dimensions larger
> than the man. (Human 60)

That Olson had immediately seen the significance of "Gassire's Lute" is evident his cryptic reference to it in a 1947 letter to Merton Sealts:

> Work 'em: if the space is there they damn well have
> to take the time. (Hoooh! that I might do such deeds!
> Hoooh! that I might sing the Dausi!) Note: pay me no
> mind. Washington heat: just turned on. (qtd. in Sealts 99)

The meaning of this non sequitur must have been lost on Sealts, but it need not be on us.

Olson dwelt in his reading of "Gassire's Lute." Like Gassire, he too was in the difficult process of becoming a a poet at a time when the way, as he saw it, was being lost in a "universe of discourse." If the West would not change, it too could go to blazes! The time was ripe for another kind of migration. A 1950 poem, "In Cold Hell, In Thicket," speaks of the necessary ordeal:

> The branches made against the sky are not for use, are
> already done, like snow-flakes, do not, cannot serve
> him who has to raise (Who puts this on, this damning of his flesh?)
> he can, but how far, how sufficiently far can he raise the thickets of
> this wilderness?
>
> How can he change, his question is
> these black and silvered knivings, these
> awkwardnesses?
>
> How can he make these blood-points into panels, into sides
> for a king's, for his own
> for a wagon, for a sleigh, for the beak of, the running sides of
> a vessel fit for
> moving?

How can he make out. he asks.
of this low eye-view.
size?

. . . . . .

that a man. men. are now their own wood
and thus their own hell and paradise
that they are. in hell or in happiness. merely
something to be wrought. to be shaped. to be carved. for use. for
others

does not in the least lessen his. this unhappy man's
obscurities. his
confrontations

He shall step. he
will shape. he
is already also
moving off

into the soil. on to his own bones (Poems 156-59)

The conditions of culture having shifted away from what has been. poets "are now their own wood." and the necessary instruments

> When the lute had sung the Dausi for the first time. King Nganamba died in the city of Dierra; when the lute had sung the Dausi for the first time. Gassire's rage melted. Gassire wept. When the lute had sung the Dausi for the first time. Wagadu disappeared--for the first time. (Genesis 106)[4]

At the end of an entire cycle of cultural migration. there is this recovery of the original poetic impulse. which makes human beings apocalyptic in their beginnings as well as their endings

If Olson recognized and accepted the birth of the poet as it is depicted in "Gassire's Lute." then there are also signs of it in his poetics. in his "Projective Verse" essay. It is a two part essay. the concerns of the first portion being largely technical. while the second part provides a more comprehensive "stance toward reality outside the poem" (Human 59). William Carlos Williams valued this essay so much that he included the first part of it in his Autobiography [4] Olson. by

contrast, eventually came to view the second section as containing its lasting significance:

> ...what I was really talking about, in even using the word "projective," was to either discover or regain some difference of art and reason and propose that there be that. In other words, the Projective Verse piece is really the last section of the "Human Universe," which if you know, Bill Williams put the first section [of "Projective Verse"] in his Autobiography. And it hurt me a little because he left out the second section, where I thought the humanism lay. You enter the subject matter, and that projection is where you permit your feeling to flow and to go out through the subject matter, and that's not the thing to do. There is, like my great master, Whitehead, said: "All is there for feeling. All does flow." That's objectively true; that is the creation. You don't use that for creation. That's like sucking off the tit, for Christ's sake. You do your own act, which is to separate yourself from that expression of feeling. You put the feeling back on the other side in time. It is an act of both mind and creation itself, on your part. (Muth II 184)

In accordance with his perception of Americans as a "last first people," a people of new cultural prospects, Olson advances a new kind of humanism or stance toward reality which he terms "objectism." Ostensibly he uses objectism to distinguish his working of the poem from that of the objectivists, but his term also recalls the feeling of man as mythological "objekt des geschehens," whose position is "no more significant than that of any other physical phenomenon" (Fox 16). Gassire amid the fields is a clear enactment of this ontological stance, more fully elaborated and more consequential than Ishmael as seen in Moby-Dick. Gassire, not destined to be king, is not implicated in the monolithic structures of human orders of inheritance. Neither is he an orphan, but an agent of present creation, free from what Olson's poetics derogate as "the lyrical interference of the individual as ego, of the 'subject' and his soul, that peculiar presumption by which western man has interposed himself between what he is as a creature

of nature (with certain instructions to carry out) and those other creations of nature which we may, without derogation, call objects" (Human 59-60). Gassire and Olson cannot become poets of projective stature until they achieve a degree of humility or whatever special objectist placement and use of the ego that translates as efficient cause in the field of forces where they dwell. The "wood" that must be shaped in Olson's "post-modern" poetics and the lute carried into the battle in the Soninke tale are in effect the same. Then, and only then, comes the singing, the Dausi that comes of such attention.

> It comes to this: the use of a man, by himself and thus by others, lies in how he conceives his relation to nature, that force to which he owes his somewhat small existence. (Human 60)

From his opening pronouncements of a new cultural space in Call Me Ishmael, Olson began to slowly move toward the articulation of an ecological poem, a world poem in which "we are ourselves both the instrument of discovery and the instrument of definition" (Human 3). Redirection of poetic tradition was not a question of literary taste but of meticulous and vital response to new conditions of reality. The topology on which New Criticism rested (i.e. inherited form as time and space) was forever shaken by shifting paradigms of physical science and global anthropology (i.e. form as no longer discrete). If writing was to catch up, it would be through its revaluation of cosmos, human nature, and the potential of language to bring about "an actual world of value" (Maximus 584). The creation of a world poem does not happen overnight, especially when we have so long been estranged from that which is most familiar. Olson chose not to abandon his researches in a precocious bid for poetry:

> I would hazard the guess that, if projective verse is practiced long enough, is driven ahead hard enough along the course I think it dictates, verse again can carry much larger material than it has carried in our language since the Elizabethans. But it cannot be jumped. We are only at its beginnings, and if I think that the Cantos make more "dramatic" sense than do the plays of Mr. Eliot, it is not because I think they have solved the problem but because the methodology of the verse in them points the way by which, one day, the problem of larger content and of larger forms may be solved. (Human 61)

A new literature is incidental to a new stance toward reality, and not vice versa. This is the essence of what I have referred to as a "post-modernism." To sing the Dausi is, perhaps, to sing the songs of Maximus. The affinity is clear, and will become more so in the final chapter of this study as the Maximus Poems speak directly of Gassire. The culture morphologist must become that which he has studied because, ultimately, he must speak in, of, and for himself as the paideumatic participant and not remain the detached articulator of a cultural theory. As Olson remarked in the Mayan Letters, it is difficult to be both an historian and a poet.

Notes:

1. In a letter dated 18 April 1918, Lawrence writes: "I also read two ponderous tomes on Africa, by a German called Frobenius. He says there was a great West Africa—Yoruban—civilization, which preceded Egypt and Carthage, and gave rise to the Atlantis myth." See The Letters of D.H. Lawrence v. 3 p 233

2. Witness the following expression of Olson's frustrations and enthusiasms in Yucatan:

> I can't see how he [museum curator] can refuse to let Sanchez use some of his drawings [of Mayan glyphs] for *Origin* ...But he is a scholar, and you know how scholars are, about "ART" —they are not timid, but they are careful, that what is their baby isn't allowed to get over to the people. For they know that that masonism of their profession is what keeps them at posts &...in the end, kills them off!
>
> And the other thing, which he has to offer, is excellent photographs of stones in situ, excellent ones, which could be (some blown up, perhaps) interspersed with the drawings as a constant reminder to the looker-on that, it is STONE, that is being demonstrated, as an ART....
>
> JESUS. The more it unfolds underhand, the more I think you have the hottest of hot ideas for an auxiliary dramatization of *Origin's* force in contemporary culture: to dramatize it by way of GLYPHS, fr the oldest and purest origin on this continent, this hemisphere! WOW....
>
> God, but it's HOT: and i shall be delighted, if anyone wants it, to write my first go at THE ART OF THE LANGUAGE OF MAYAN GLYPHS, for a catalogue, or whatever....
>
> I'm telling you, Cid, you have in yr hands the makings of one of those shows (like the Armory Show, 1913, wasn't it, which blew the States across, with the French) or, more to my wonder, that show the Mus of Mod Art, in NY, shot over, years ago, on the ART OF THE CAVES (organized, by god, by Leo Frobenius—which fact is so little remembered I have never seen anyone point it out)... [for our purposes it is unfortunate that the editor of these letters makes an abridgement here!]. (Origin 41-2)

3. Tracking der weg, it first appears in Olson's 1948 essay "Notes on the Proposition: Man is Prospective":

> From Dante to Pound it has been problems of time which have troubled the artists and governed men. It is no

> longer so. We are more separated from these men than we know....The path does die. (Boundary 2).

Then it reappears (modulated between German and English) in the poem "Conqueror," also written in 1948:

The answer is easy. We know where the grass is.
But der Weg tough as we are a path is not stirbt easy to
[get the foot on
mister gull.

We know the stupid ones are dead. They cover the smell of the rain
which is a way of saying knowledge of the most elementary things.

A man, a revolution proceeds out of, a man, the root curiosity,
[the process
question, and the end
a method. His motion will be less clear, at least double in
[direction, himself ahead
and backward as he goes. He starts where the path died (Poems 72)

In the summer of 1951 at Black Mountain College, Olson wrote a dance-play that enacts the movement toward a form of personal awareness. In his "Apollonius of Tyana" we find the inversion of and the means arcund the fact that "the way dies":

> When Apollonius moved off again, he went south east, down the two old rivers of the East, to BAGDAD. We have forgotten what any Arab knows, that Bagdad, for all the long years -the centuries- after the collapse of man's first disciplines (man's first cities), Bagdad remained the intellectual center, the old intellectual center, and much more in touch with the old path than Alexandria ever was, or that the newest Alexandria, your Manhatten is, today, any clue to the path, the path which doesn't die, the path which is no more than yourself, if you can find it. (Human 31)

4. Cf. the memoir of Olson's former student regarding the fame of "Projective Verse" and the view of his poetics that Olson stressed:

> One day we managed to get you [Olson] talking about "Projective Verse," a subject everyone was of course very interested in, but which you seemed rather tired of. You seemed to feel that the term had become too easy a tag for you, and that people were making too much of it. You called our attention to Mallarme's Preface to Un Coup de Des, where you said we would find much the same view as your own. (Boer 63)

CHAPTER FIVE: TOWARDS A WORLD POEM

In previous chapters, I have tried to demonstrate that during a crucial stage in his development as a writer and thinker Olson found certain Frobenian concepts and materials to be extremely pertinent and useful. They would find a lasting place in his cultural methodology and literary production. My concern has been to address the question of whether working through Frobenius in the late 1940s and early 1950s provided Olson with a bridgework between his perceptions in Call Me Ishmael and his subsequent explorations in the Maximus Poems. I believe this to be the case and will close my study by reaffirming the link.

At a reading at Goddard College on 14 April 1962, Olson confided that his intent in doing the book on Melville had been "to arrest the West. In fact I was so disappointed when everything didn't stop, it knocked me out for five months. I couldn't imagine how the world could have this book and not [laughs] catch up!" (qtd. in Butterick 69-70). In a letter on 14 February 1968, Olson reiterated that in publishing Call Me Ishmael he "had hoped of course that the World would stand still!" (Charters 11). Having traced a path running through Western history from its Bronze Age Mediterranean origins to the juxtaposition of an alternate possibility on the wide Pacific, Olson failed as Melville had failed to change the world with his art. The Peqoud sank, and all were lost, save one. "What next" was an obvious question for Olson at this point. In Olson's view, Melville had returned to Christianity.

Olson moved on, by some available means, and eventually there appeared many songs from Maximus of Gloucester:

the flowering plum
out the front door window
sends whiteness
inside my house

as the news that the almond
was in bloom Mallorca
accompanied the news
that that book was in print
which I wish might stop
the workings of my city
where so much of it
was bred

(as in another spring,
I learned
the world does not stop
for flowers

2

it puts a man back
to find out how much
he is busy this way,
not as his fellows are
but as flowering trees
turn several greens
(as many as there are greys
of their several trunks

. . . . . .

as one is, until one discovers
there is no other issue than
the moment of
the pleasure of
this plum,

these things
which don't carry their end any further than
their reality in
themselves (Maximus 45-46)

As I have previously suggested, it is conceivable that Olson, like Gassire, had felt stranded along a migratory path of power, unable to assume a place in the established order. In becoming a poet, it is possible that Olson was stepping unaccompanied into a place that the shaman referred Gassire to as not "second of the first" but "first of the second." (Genesis 102)

I measure my song,
measure the sources of my song,
measure me, measure
my forces (Maximus 48)

Not to be just any poet, but the poet of his own space. It is not only feasible but instructive to think of Olson in this way. I will try to measure the poet's song.

Don Byrd rightly observes, at the outset of his meticulous and extensive study of the Maximus Poems, that it "is possible for a reader to slip and slide over the surface of the Maximus on the ice of language which almost means what he intends" (Byrd, xii). My mention of Frobenius in discussion of the Maximus Poems must largely remain approximate and contextual, since, unlike Herodotus or Whitehead, he is absent by name in the substance of these poems. The evidence that indicates the importance of Frobenius in Olson's thought is verifiably located in Olson's prose; to dig for it too insistently in his poems denies their integrity. A close rapport between his prose concerns and the practice of his poetry can certainly be taken for granted, but the poetic link between Frobenius and Olson must, to my thinking, remain essentially the affinity and parallel of intellectual grounding rather than the vertical structure of some strict application. In any case, I will not try to prove otherwise. A single concept like paideuma might, of course, appear sufficient and general enough to underscore the expanse and duration of Olson's poem sequence, but "paideuma" never appears in the Maximus Poems however much it might be used to explain the work as a whole. Therefore, I will try to maintain a balance: not to indulge in "this is how the poems are," when I should say "this is also how they may be understood."

Speaking of the Maximus Poems is a major project in itself. The prospects of doing so in a study of this size are more limited. What I am prepared to do, and how I have chosen to conclude this thesis, is to speak of the Maximus Poems in terms of the pleistocene and proceed to further narrow discussion by means of a specific time frame and its concurrent documentation. This is not, therefore, another survey of the poems across the twenty years of their production. What it is instead is a new consideration of the poems directly obtained by the event of Olson's own revaluation of his connection with Frobenius.

As documents reveal, when Olson returned to Frobenius in 1965, he did so in the global context of the migration of culture; certainly they continued to have that in common. From the macrocosm of a world culture to the microcosm of individual existence, Frobenius had seen that movement is the nature of organic things:

> The geographical shift which we can trace in every enhancement of culture (or vice versa) is in accordance with the paideumatic law that all temporal growth is connected with a movement through space. (Fox 16)

Or, as Olson put it somewhat differently in a poem written at the time of his re-examination of Frobenius:

> Migration in fact (which is probably
> as constant in history as any one thing: migration
>
> is the pursuit by animals, plants & men of a suitable
> --and gods as well--& preferable
>
> environment; and leads always to a new center.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> to the impetus (the raging there is added the
> Animus: that the Mind or Will always
>
> successfully opposes & invades the Previous, This
> is the rose is the rose is the rose of the World
>
> (Maximus 565)

Although Frobenius and Olson had migration in common, they also shared the "unusual" and initial grounding of the Pleistocene, which Olson explored as a present value, "a way that does not die." Like Frobenius, Olson felt the need for a change in "our feeling for life," away from pedantry and the too easy patterns of inheritance. Yet when the enormous perspective of human existence has been intuited, and theorized, and finally documented by the scientist, it must then be demonstrated by the poet. "From Homer back and from Melville forward," Olson once said, we stand potentially outside the European habits of mind (Prose 40). If the post-glacial morphologically resembles the epiglacial condition, the description requires proof of an experience from "post-modern" poetics.

It must be remembered that Frobenius began to investigate Africa in order to pursue the Pleistocene of Europe. He set about addressing the problem in terms of a European-African connection. Rock painting had flourished during the late Pleistocene era and still offered clues to European origins among peoples of Africa who still painted pictures on rocks. When the paintings would not speak, the myths, folktales, and legends of today might speak, however haltingly, of the distant past. Frobenius was looking for the last remainders of our pleistocene roots. In sharp relief yet stemming from this Frobenian morphology is Olson's oracular exploration of the pleistocene. His project is at once less scientific and more direct than that of Frobenius: the pleistocene could not only be taken up and studied but learned and lived today.

Long before he withdrew from teaching at the State University of New York at Buffalo and wrote the series of letters to John Clarke that

were later published as Pleistocene Man (1968), Olson argued for the pleistocene as a strategic placement of self in the context of the mass conditions of modern society. As he summarized his appreciation of the pleistocene stance for Stan Brakhage:

> I have, even tho' I suffer from claustrophobia, crawled around IN those tunnels, seen how, very often, the Pleistocene man HAD, that is chose, to paint where he couldn't have been more than six inches from where he was painting, eyes THAT close. And the point is, after all, that Pleistoscene Man WAS that close to us, where we are--that is: he was living in a world where all predators, that is everything that COULD EAT HIM, was so MUCH larger than he was!...and then how he did choose to paint where he did, in that most difficult position, rather than just anywhere, per chance. I love that sense of that fisty little creature being, maybe, FIRST to say: 'Fuck you,' to all of it which didn't arise from HIMself, in the sense of: 'I will have it my way'...I mean, his knowing that he must GIVE instruction or be eaten by nature. (qtd. in Brakhage)

To have a full sense of just how radical, tough and resistant his historical sense of the individual is, one has only to compare this to the views of such reasonable contemporaries as Arnold Toynbee, for whom: "The human being is ephemeral in himself, a wave that rises and falls, a bubble that forms and bursts on the surface of that immortal sea which brought us hither, and which our souls have had glimpses of in a season of fine weather."

To further understand what Olson works with as pleistocene, the terms space (or topos), fact (typos), and stance (tropos) can be used, as they have been in earlier discussion. Pleistocene space is literal and vibrant. Space is where initial contacts between world and human beings are made. The Maximus Poems attempt to explore these terms for the "first time." There is no other, ulterior, or higher place:

> There are no hierarchies, no infinite, no such many as
> [mass, there are only
> eyes in all heads,
> to be looked out of (33)

Unaided by the generalizations of inheritance, with no civilization to sustain it or fall back on, the pleistocene condition of the poems is a turning to the facts of the world and of oneself immediately. The past is only whatever is significant enough to impinge and thus be remembered.

> that all start up
> to the eye and soul
> as though it had never
> happened before

In this archaic absolute of creation, the poems speak from and for a world, or "mappemunde," that centres existence as root person in root place. The incremental duration of the poems only serves to reiterate and expand this initial, tutorial posture.

> the Blow is Creation
> & the Twist the Nasturtium
> is any one of Ourselves
> And the Place of it All?
> Mother Earth Alone (Maximus 634)

In one sense, Olson wrote these poems as a "stepping away" from what he found to be the entropic direction of the historical circumstances that he was born into.

When he was pointedly asked at one point why he so often went to other cultures to get his myth, Olson's clear response was:

> I thought I just bridged the cultures. I don't believe in cultures myself. I think that's a lot of hung up stuff like organized anything. I believe there is simply ourselves, and where we are has a particularity which we'd better use because that's about all we've got. Otherwise we're running around looking for somebody else's stuff....I think we live so totally in an acculturated time that the reason why we're all here that care and write is to put an end to the whole thing. (Muth I 94)

What the hard surface of Olson's iconoclastic rejection of culture and generalizing history disguises is his constant affirmation that

an identity of discovery and definition is the only true and meaningful foundation of culture. At bottom, culture is the paideumatic spark or structure of creation. Attention exists as an initial relation. The history of attention is the only history Olson will account for. It is this sense of a primal or first responsibility that underscores the intent behind Olson's exhortation to:

> put an end to nation, put an end to culture, put an end to divisions of all sorts. And to do this you have to put establishment out of business.... not the invention, but the discovery of formal structural means is for me the form of action. The radical of action lies in finding out how organized things are genuine, are initial...the imago mundi. That that's initial in any of us. We have our picture of the world and that's the creation.

For Olson, the pleistocene does not recognize establishment, but only a literal particularity where the "truth lies solely in what you do with it. And that means you."

As Olson put it to John Clarke in Pleistocene Man, subtitled "curriculum for the study of the soul," pleistocene can and should be learned, especially by poets. "It's almost like poetry. In fact it is poetry, Pleistocene, in that simplest alphabetic sense, that you can learn the language of being alive...as though you were learning to read and to write for the first time" (9). Olson urged others to approach the pleistocene "like bus trips to a Museum never before accomplished" (11). As to the gain involved, "Poetry is the end of it all," and "has to be so from the beginning." With pleistocene, "you have the beginning," because: "There isn't anything earlier; or further; (or higher than the top of the s-p-i-n-e)" (12). To distinguish:

the proper soul
in the proper body
is mythological

the general soul
in the general body
is theological

the person's soul
in the person's body
is for psychology (Poems 490)

Olson's Maximus is not so much a psychological persona as he is a human condition that maximizes particularity. Olson's morphologic, poetic research in Yucatan had allowed few res cogitans / res extensa separations. Shifting emphasis from archeology to prehistory, Olson was equally determined to explore immediacy, something which he admits is "frightfully abstract if you don't see that I am making pictures --that I am what I am interested in: a mythologist" (History 57)

No Greek will be able
to discriminate my body
An American
is a complex of occasions,
themselves a geometry
of spatial nature.

I have this sense,
that I am one
with my skin.

Plus this--plus this:

that forever the geography

which leans in

on me I compell

backwards I compell Gloucester

to yield, to

change

Polis

is this (Maximus 184-85)

***

On 25 November 1965, the Times Literary Supplement published a review of several volumes of Olson's prose that focused on Olson as a hipster academician and "guru" of culture morphology. The review is a composite of mockery and grudging acknowledgement:

> Mr. Olson is against the notion of the universal and also against the notion of specialization. Each poet has to make a testing sense of what is available to him. The books which Mr. Olson recommends to his students are not parts of a system or tradition but books that give a sense of beginnings, in the American frontier, and of very ancient things carried on, Babylon and Sumeria behind the Old Testament, Semitic place names in Homer. Culture, civilization, history (except history as personal exploration as in Herodotus) and, above all, sociology are dirty words for him.
>
> He wants to re-create primal experiences. Like Pound, he is an admirer of Frobenius, and thinks morphology is a better guide today than history. He enjoys working out amateurish cultural time-scales, punctuated by great names or great inventions in capital letters....
>
> English readers of these essays, however, may fail to recognize Mr. Olson as an originating power because they will be irritated by his mannerisms, because his tone, like Pound's tone, will seem to them forced and strained, and

> because of what will seem to them the violent viewiness and crankiness, and a propensity for solving the problems of the world by drawing diagrams. (1071)

What is most interesting in connection with these observations is the response they seem to have provoked in Olson himself. Within days of reading the TLS review, Olson was rereading Leo Frobenius. "Returned to, for new attention, fall LXV," and "Sunday December 12th" are written on the coversheet of his copy of Prehistoric Rock Paintings in Europe and Africa (acquired by Olson in 1952, as also noted on the coversheet). The text is thoroughly inscribed with Olson's marginalia, which attends to Frobenius while responding to the criticism in the TLS review. Olson's comments form a particular relation to the material in the book. What emerges is a double strand of affinity and questions. This is a highly critical reading of Frobenius and not simply compliant appreciation. While the two thinkers embrace the Pleistocene as value, Frobenius often distances it as a temporal object of consideration, which Olson objects to, declaring his impatience with any and all "art directors," regardless of their credentials. In constrast, Olson holds pleistocene to be not simply the artifacts of speech but a place from which to speak. As an artist he will make this essential move from objectivity to subjectivity.[1]

The following section presents the gist of Olson's markings (left underlined) and *glosses* (in italics between slashes) in response to what Frobenius relates as "the story of rock picture research." If I was unable to distinguish something in Olson's hand, I have indicated as much with a [?] after any word I have attempted. [...?] is in place of illegible words or phrases left as such. I have gathered Olson's marginalia in terms of his contrasting responses and, therefore, the

pages are occasionally out of sequence.

READING WITH THE TEXT:

Frobenius begins his "story of rock picture research," outlining the intellectual context into which the facts of Altamira failed to enter:

> ...it must be remembered that the pictures had been painted many thousands of years before the beginning of history, that they showed that Ice Age man had reached a level in matters of art so high as to be removed not so very far from our own, and, finally, that such evidence was in no sense compatible with the precepts of the then current evolutionary conception of the development of human culture (14).

Olson remarks that little seems to have changed in some quarters during the subsequent seventy years, while giving Frobenius full credit for having avoided the historical generalizing tendency:

> */ the then current evolutionary conception of the development of human culture: see rev. TLS Nov 24th of my essays by Edw Lucie-Smith for further connection* [?] *---& the other rider Frobenius was clear headed enough not even to notice the preserved Thucydidean /*

Olson's identification of the "anonymous" TLS reviewer is interesting. Perhaps Edward Dorn or Jeremy Prine s[illegible]ied him with the author's name. At any rate, Olson continues to follow Frobenius' account of the circular reasoning of colleagues who refused to accept the vital significance of prehistoric evidence:

> The gentlemen of the Anthropological Society gathered in Professor Bastian's room that evening shook their respective heads and said there was no need to take the matter tragically. ...Why? Because, at that time, the West European intellect had come more and more to the conviction that the culture of the day was the highest to which man had ever attained...because it had dedicated itself more and more to the belief that the earlier and older cultures, though they might have enjoyed a certain stature and significance in ancient Greece, were in no sense to be compared with the greatness of a modern scientific existence...above all, because it was convinced that everything which had developed before the beginning of history (even

> then set at 3000 B.C.) could be regarded as only primitive, amateurish and insignificant in comparison with nineteenth century splendor.

Alongside his markings, Olson writes "*1895 Adolf Bastian's room*" as though identifying the enemy (15). Adolf Bastian espoused a theory which assumed all cultures to be fundamentally alike but arising in geographical independence. Friedrich Ratzel advanced an evolutionary historical theory of culture circles from which Frobenius also soon diverged. To Frobenius, their failure to effectively deal with the materials of Altamira revealed the shortcomings of general cultural theory:

> Neither of these theories [Bastian's or Ratzel's] was sufficient for someone possessed by the idea of culture per se, as a totality, as a whole (16)

> It was, for instance, generally accepted that the older Stone Age culture, since it showed little relation to those of the post-glacial period, had died out when the ice receded northward....German scholars thought that the culture had decayed and died. Not so the then young Leo Frobenius. It did not seem likely to him that anything so essentially alive could vanish so completely. Had it not died, its descendants would have to be sought elsewhere; had it really died, some traces of its cultural increment were bound to have cropped up in the cultures of a later period....[Frobenius] asked himself if it were not possible for this culture to have been indigenous to Africa as well as to Europe....Were that the case, then one could imagine that when the water evaporated and the plains turned into a desert, the African branch of this culture, if one wished to call it that, had moved southward towards the moist interior, that penetrated as far as South Africa (15-16)

/ now being shown to be continuous --on the ice [?]/

> It was necessary to investigate first the living cultures in order to determine to what extent the original (not to be confused with the later so-called 'historical") *Kulturkreislehre* (doctrine of culture circles) was valid (18)

/ the original, not to be confused with the historical (exactly again what Edw Lucie-Smith mocks me for--TLS Nov 25th 1965)/

2. Frobenius in the Field:

> It will be our task to handle our materials not only linguistically, descriptively and philologically but also graphically. That means that every expedition will be equipped with a staff of artists who will transfer to paper and canvas that which cannot be recorded accurately with the camera.[2] (17)

Here Olson notes how his own proposed methods for further field studies in Yucatan closely, even strikingly resemble those of Frobenius.

> */ / without knowing it what I proposed to Wenner-Gren in 1951--& further than F* [robenius]*: not to be carted off as specimens--seen in location /*

This is worth noting since Olson had not apparently read these procedures before conducting his work in 1951.[3]

> It was a pure question of application, first to get the material together and then to see how much we can learn alone from the geographic distribution of certain cultural implements (i.e. drum, bow, spear).
>
> */ drum--& plucked instrument (and blown? /*

Where Frobenius attempts to distinguish between Ratzel's evolutionary and his own "original" (i.e. paideumatic) kulturkreislehre, Olson takes an imaginative turn to involve himself with "first things": weapons seen as instruments of an original poetic impulse.

READING AGAINST THE TEXT:

Olson's basic response, as I see it, consists of his going along with the text as an alert and sympathetic reader on side with Frobenius in the prehistory "debate." In sharp contrast to this is his second response which is critical of something in the text and draws a line between Frobenius and himself on the question of "handling" the Pleistocene.[4] Olson dismisses Frobenius' talk of magic as a kind of modern presumption.

> We see also that each weapon is characteristic of a separate mentality. The people with throwing sticks for their spears and darts, the dwellers in caves, cunningly use the complicated relationships of their totemistic organizations and the whole paraphernalia of their symbolism to deceive themselves about the main issues of life. The users of the bow are of quite another stamp. Without illusion, they attack and destroy each other and are as aggressive as the former are defensive. Theirs is a cannibal-like mind, bent on conquest (27-28).

/ says you , Leo? /

Olson resents the attempt to place the results of research into our prehistory "in perspective." It is in the sense of righting a wrong that he turns the tables on Frobenius in the following passage:

> It is interesting to see, the more we go into the matter, how the contrasts appear, how the picture of "that which was" comes into focus, and how the cultural phenomena of an earlier period are revealed. In this short space it is not possible to do more than point a direction. But anyone who has followed carefully the variations in style from prehistoric into archeological and finally historic times will see the main lines and know how necessary it is to use a special gauge for his comparisons rather than the scale with which he measures the more familiar occurrences of his daily life. For it has come to pass that we modern Europeans, concentrating on the newspaper and on that which happens from one day to the next, have lost the ability to think in large dimensions.
>
> */ this is not bad Mr. Big Shot*
>
> *or say have lost the ability to cunningly use the complicated relationships of totemistic organizations to deceive ourselves about the main issues of life? /*

***

If, as I have maintained, knowledge is the basis of culture, the the discovery of America was an event of tremendous impact on European thought, imagination and expectations; just as the excavation of Herculaneum and Pompeii during the eighteenth century was an unprecedented event. So too in this century. The news of our distant past probably proves, in its way and for certain sensibilities, to be a central event:

> the spreading news that painted animals of great size and indisputable vigor of line could be seen on the walls of caves which no one had entered for 25,000 years. (Kenner 29)

I would assert that, from a critical standpoint, it is essential to mind the consequences of this encounter when discussing creative thought in this century. Hugh Kenner's analysis of this focal contact with our Pleistocene roots bears upon a crucial dovetailing of fact and idea (evidence and concept) that was his focus when speaking of Pound and Frobenius:

> Henri Gaudier by his 20th year had learned to catch in instantaneous lines the autonomy of a panther or a stag; he and a Dordogne draughtsman were thenceforth co-equals. (30)

The Pleistocene did create the Modern. But beyond the aesthetics of the new were the far reaching cultural implications of the pleistocene which by and large escaped the Modernists, again due to their historical preoccupations.

It can be argued, and must be it seems to me, that the arts do share in the concrete developments and recoveries of scientific and methodological research. Frobenian advances were part of the vortex of thought that Pound, and Olson after him, would explore, each in his own way. Both the subject matter and the methods of the prime sciences of man necessarily affect the arts when the facts and concepts brought forward by the sciences are seen, by even a few, as being relevant and motivating, present and for use. We could make a start, as Pound urged, by distinguishing between retrospective and prospective study.

T.S. Eliot, a one time student of Yoga and Sanskrit, in 1919 encountered the paintings at Altamira and said art never improves, but rather enters a simultaneous order. It was a different, or perhaps

the same T.S. Eliot who later retrenched dramatically behind classicism, royalism and Anglo-Catholicism. "It is because of our common background in the literatures of Greece, Rome and Israel, that we can speak of 'European literature' at all," he said (211). Eliot came to believe that the survival of "European" literature "depends on our continued veneration of our ancestors." In this Eliot was not alone. The world moves on. How strange, how reactionary too sounds even Pound when he suggests:

> ...I should claim to get on from where Frobenius left
> off, in that his Morphology was applied to savages and
> my interest is in civilizations at their most. (Letters 316)

By the end of the thirties, even Pound engaged in the bolstering of a Eurocentric order.

Yes, the Pleistocene did create the Modern. But in the wake of an aesthetics of morphology what remains? Where are we now? Probably more than any writer of his day, Olson demonstrated the profound influence that the perspective of prehistory has had on contemporary thought and writing. From the very beginning--

> Off-shore, by islands hidden in the blood
> jewels & miracles, I, Maximus
> a metal hot from boiling water, tell you
> what is a lance, who obeys the figures of
> the present dance (Maximus 5)

--Olson's remarkable venture into the language of self is sustained without a falling back into what he disparaged as "the private soul at any public wall" (Human 51). Maximus of Gloucester is the "I" of these poems. As Fenollosa reminds us, a lance or a spear in hand connotes "a very emphatic I" (21).[5] The nature of the emphasis in these poems is increasingly causal, mythological, and pleistocene--the attentions of a root person in root place. Olson was among the first to recognize

conditions of existence that are common "from Folsom cave to now," the first to partake in what Gary Snyder has since called "the most archaic values on earth."

There is a need for more than a passing consideration of the genesis and articulation of the pleistocene in Olson's work. As a methodology of knowing, given Olson's continual reference to the need for a "methodology," the pleistocene would seem to me to be more than a mere artistic "technique," much less an exotica of taste. The question of how Olson arrived at the pleistocene in a way that the Moderns did not must be asked, again and again if necessary. I would suggest that his encounter with Frobenius was of prime importance, if not crucial, to his migration toward the pleistocene, and this on two fronts. Olson perceived contact with first things and first relations to be the only way through and beyond the impasse of Western civilization.

In the weeks that followed his review of Frobenius, Olson wrote a stunning Maximus poem which contains the only direct and explicit use of anything Frobenian in the entire Maximus sequence. As has repeatedly been mentioned, he shared with Frobenius a feeling for the Pleistocene as a kind of initial grounding for who we are today. Olson was further able to perceive and acknowledge that such grounding has been evident to people throughout history and in many locations. In the particular Maximus poem that pays indirect tribute to Frobenius, he again revives his affiliation with Gassire. In his study of Frobenian theory, method and materials, Olson was lastingly cognizant of one tale which further disclosed to him an initial stance. In presenting Gassire's story, he pushes his affinity for the material in the direction of identification and use: to speak of his own fate.

"As of Parsonses or Fishermans Field or Cressys Beach
or Washington, the Capital, or my Front Yard?"

Swly to a Plumb-
Tree

spirit water spirit
level --well &
pond, well &
sea--water is
Father
Otter
Gassire's
fate to
1 FA-to
s-i-n-g the
root of
the Well of the
Liquid of the
Eagle's mouth:
teonanacatl is also
God's body
Ymir's trunk
the 'Tree' is--its roots are in the
'Head" of Mimir's
reflecting in his
Pool of

a man's song
when
his father who is King won't
or even if he does if Gassire's fate is
fa-is
the son of Poseidon's fate is
songs he'll
sing from the Well of
his own Sons'
until his own sons' blood does
awaken in the wood--the

instrument of song carved by the smith from
the tree's trunk:
he was provoked--each man is
or each man who is not to be King
--Prince in another
vocabulary
Leader in

our own sense

agent of
all other persons for a superior

purpose, that
their lives, all lives--Atgeld the Eagle, the Eagle

always, the
bird who <u>flies</u> not necessarily can or does sing

does Fish perfectly in the deep-cloven river's walls & all
[the Jungle Folk startle as
the Golden Bird falls from the sky--fills the sky, to fish (to
lead--not I not any Son not any Poet we
as Chaucer in the eagle's feet, going up to see the
House of Fame is taught,
by the eagle, Geoffrey
your meter & your mode's all right but
my dear Chaucer you don't speak well of what is important, you
shall, when I return you to Earth, I <u>hope</u>, know more

the Partridge in the bushes was the one & I at Stage Fort Park was
played as out this kitchen porch a night in summer not so long ago was

or, years ago, one summer night too, sitting the curb at the head of
the street
I lived on in Washington the
capital of this great poor Nation
I had some time before--the Muses? where were the Muses--are the
Muses always in the guises of the
birds upon the earth,
there a nightingale, here a nightingale, Cressy's beach a nightingale
oh here nightingales?
in the night's air I alone
not partridges who drum as they fly coo or don't speak <u>here</u>?

in any case any way always I was drummed ahead by
nightingales alone, here in the United States (part of America
--& wells are where our speech comes from
we speak with water
on our tongues when
Earth
has made us parts of the World again, & the Airs which belong to Birds
[have
led our lives to be things instead of Kings

in celebration of Events long past,
March 29th MDCCCCLXVI

(<u>Maximus</u> 509-10)

When compared with either Ezra Pound's or Robert Duncan's use of

"Gassire's Lute," Olson's reference is more personal because it is, in fact, a different condition of song. As Olson observed in 1969:

> [Duncan] writes those "Passages" almost like cantos.... Dunky really has again shown himself to be one of the damn few if not the only progressive compositionalist amongst us....And I ain't got nothing to do...with cantos. I couldn't write a canto if I sat down and deliberately tried. My interest is...in another condition of song, which is connected to mode, and has therefore to do with absolute actuality. (Muth II 121-22)

While composition is operative in the focus of both Pound's--

> 4 times was the city rebuilded, Hooo Fasa
> Gassir, Hooo Fasa dell' Italia tradita
> now in the mind indestructable, Gassir, Hoooo Fasa,
> With the four giants at the four corners
> and four gates mid-wall Hooo Fasa
> and a terrace the colour of stars
> pale as the dawn cloud (Cantos 430)

and Duncan's use of the material--

> From house to house the armed men go,
>
> in Santo Domingo hired and conscripted killers
> against the power of an idea, against
>
> Gassire's lute, the song
>
> of Wagadu, household of the folk,
>
> commune of communes
>
> hidden seed in the hearts of men
>
> and in each woman's womb hidden.
>
> They do not know where it is (Bow 77)

Olson focusses on the fate of Gassire rather than his given context, Wagadu. In Olson's poem, Gassire is a fate, cut off from the fathers and the sons, a man of an eternal present. The poem presents this rift with paternity, this break with history. Also evident is that only in assuming his destiny can Maximus "celebrate events long past."

So, what of the events referred to in Olson's poem? I will allow myself a wide and reckless conjecture, by way of a conclusion to this study. "Of Parsonses" is a celebration of events long past. Whose past is a reasonable question. If I commit a biographical fallacy, perhaps it is warranted in this poem. The mention of Chaucer is intriguing, firstly, because an earlier allusion by Olson to Chaucer's significance occurs in "The Kingfishers," Olson's first major and ground clearing poem. Here is my conjecture: is not the fate of Gassire like the fate of Olson, as Chaucer's dream visions are like Olson's "Kingfishers"? As a prologue to a new literature, Chaucer wrote his dream visions, which began with "The Book of the Duchess," out of the perspective of the emerging language of a people:

> Me thoght thus: that hyt was May,
> And in the dawenynge I lay
> (Me metter thus) in my bed al naked
> and loked forth, for I was waked
> with smale foules a gret hep
> That had affrayed me out of my slep
> Thorgh noyse and swetnesse of her song. (334)

Alluding to the place of Chaucer's poem in the context of a new writing Olson began "The Kingfishers" with:

> He woke, fully clothed, in his bed. He
> remembered only one thing, the birds, how
> when he came in, he had gone around the rooms
> and got them back in their cage, the green one first,
> she with the bad leg, and then the blue,
> the one they had hoped was a male (Poems 86)

To repeat my conjecture, "The Kingfishers" is to Olson what the dream visions were to Chaucer--the prologue to a new literature. It is to celebrate a new stance toward reality--resulting in, among other things, new forms of writing that loosen the estrangement from what is

most familiar--that Maximus acknowledges another who let his life be things instead of kings, someone for whom Wagadu, like Olson's West, had become a full stop.

Notes:

1. A pertinent aside to this is Olson's concurrent reading of Gertrude Levy's study of stone age religious conceptions and their influence on European thought, The Gate of Horn which he also slams for its occasional lapses into positivism. See George Butterick's Guide to the Maximus Poems.

2. These early Frobenian proposals for a comprehensive approach to field work have been cited in full in Chapter Two if this study.

3. For a full outline of Olson's comprehensive approach to the study of artifacts in their original locations see "Project (1951): The Art of the Language of Mayan Glyphs." Alcheringa 5 (1973): 94-100.

4. Olson's marginalia to the the Museum of Modern Art's short acknowledgement to Frobenius is informative here:

> Such technical and esthetic qualities are enviable but no more so than the unquestioned sense of social usefulness which these prehistoric pictures suggest. Until recently our own mural art was usually an architect's after-thought, a mere decorative post-script.... The mural art of the Spanish caves and African cliffs was, on the contrary, an integral and essential function of life, for these painted animals were almost certainly magic symbols used to insure the successful hunting of real animals [Olson has crossed out every word of the previous two lines]. Today's walls are painted so that the artist may eat, but in prehistoric times walls were painted so that the community might eat [to which Olson responds: *Ha Ha*].
>
> We can, as modern men, no longer believe in the magic efficacy of these rock paintings; but there is about them a deeper and more general magic quite beyond their beauty as works of art or their value as anthropological documents.
>
> Even in facsimile they evoke an atmosphere of antediluvian first things, a strenuous Eden where Adam drew animals before he named them (9-10)

& look: same argument ...[?] 1965 (wow
37
28 years oh Lord
as Edw Lucie-Smith (is he too an art-director?
or such such hack as ...[several names given]

5. In The Chinese Written Character as a Medium For Poetry, Fenollosa observes that even pronouns yield striking verbal metaphor:

> They are a constant source of weakness if colorlessly

translated. Take, for example, the five forms of 'I.' There is the sign of a 'spear in the hand' = a very emphatic I; five and a mouth = a weak and defensive I, holding off a crowd by speaking; to conceal = a selfish and private I; self (the cocoon sign) and a mouth = an egotistic I, one who takes pleasure in his own speaking; the self presented is used only when one is speaking to one's self. (20-21)

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APPENDIX ONE: The Douglas C. Fox / Charles Olson Correspondence

17 Sep 46

Dear Olson,

Thanks for your note. Yes, Erythraea is second to Paideuma. Many would probably find it the more interesting of the two because of the rock pictures. The MS you refer to is Schicksalsunde. Translated it in '34 before I had a proper command of the language. It probably stinks. You will see it eventually if and when I can find it. Have no home at the moment and my things are scattered. You may not find the N.E.W. articles worth re-publishing. Am not at all sure that they were well digested. At any rate I'd like to look them over first. Also I don't want to publish anything without knowing the rag in which it is to appear. Publication in the wrong medium can do more harm than good. Your suggestion about translating more of the Atlantis series and finally bringing out another volume is a good one and could be done eventually. In the immediate future, however, I won't have time for it.

Heard yesterday from Katherine Cowen. She sensibly did not commit herself without knowing just waht it is you had in mind. But she is interested, and I suggest that you get in touch with her stating what you are doing, what you intend to do and what you would like her to undertake. I have considerable respect for her ability and judgement. She also has a delightful sense of humor. Write to Katherine Muir Cowen, Low Meadow, Topsfield, Massachussets. Meanwhile, let me know when you get to Washington. Perhaps by then things will have changed and I'll have some time to devote to Frobenius. At the moment my free time is taken up with other matters.

All good wishes,

Fox.

217 Randolph Place NE
Washinton 2, D.C.
April 19, 1947

My dear Douglas Fox:

Regret very much you are not here. Called, wanted to see you, to bring you a copy of my book, CALL ME ISHMAEL, just out: will hold until I hear from you, for one day I should like very much to have your analysis of the stuff on Space in it (written, as you may recall, before I knew of your work, and your colleague's).

Wanted also to get a permission of you. Finished the first draft of a piece last night which gives me a chance I have long waited for, to make what I take to be novel use of two of your tales, the Kabyl First Man, Woman and 50 Chillun and Gassire. I shall enclose on a separate page the opening of the article and the way I acknowledge you, in order that you may have a sense of the intent and present form of the piece. The Kabyl, due to the design, is condensed and somewhat rewritten, and Gassire I break up some at the beginning but from the partridge on use pretty much as you have so finely translated it.

Now I don't, of course, know where the thing will land. Harper's Bazaar, who have bought a couple of my verse, has asked to see something else and I am thinking of trying this out on them. But in any case I wanted to get this letter off to you in hopes that it will reach you quickly and that you will be able to let me know if the whole idea meets with your approval, if you will grant me permission to make what use I have of the material and, if you will be so kind, what the copyright situation is and what terms would be agreeable under it.

At the moment I am somewhat excited about the thing, for it is the first break in some of the things we talked about last year, and I have hopes more might follow from it. Do let me know any developments along these lines from your end.

And how are you?

And what are you up to?

Our friends and I speak of you often.

Yours,

Charles Olson.

Vienna

28 April 1947

Dear Olsen [sic],

Have just received your letter. Frobenius is dead, the book out of print & the copyright rests with me.[1] So, as long as you give the book & its compilers ancient & modern some credit, go ahead --and send me a couple of copies of whatever appears. I gather you want a quick answer (I am also pressed for time at the moment) so this is it.

Regards,
Douglas C. Fox.

You may send me "Call Me Ishmael" --and I'm glad that it is in print again-- at: [address given]

P.S. Had a note from Dorothy P. [Pound] asking me to meet her for cocktails. Will you please thank her & say I'll take a rain check. Regards to all.

1. The book Fox is refering to is African Genesis.

APPENDIX TWO: A Letter from John Clarke to Peter McGuire

May 25 1989

Dear Peter,

The, or one, problem with the O-Fro connection for Charles is that he couldn't read Germ. so only had The Childhood of Man (1909), African Genesis (the stories - now pub. by Turtle Island), and that book on Cave Art* - but no Erlebt Erdteile in 7 vols (Frankfort am Main, 1929) as such, which Pound tried for years to get translated. O got to F thru Ez (another cat-man) (a Pound look-alike). I think Baraka began translations for German M.A. but were later destroyed. You might write to him in Newark ([address given]...also a good friend of Olson).

*Frobenius and Douglas C. Fox, Prehistoric Rock Pictures in Europe and Africa (1937).

Guy Davenport knows the Pound-Frobenius connection, but not the Olson side, tho you may have to do that one first anyway. What O liked abt F was his ability at a young age to bust thru all the academic B.S., listen at the wharves, get on the boat® to Africa & find the Benin bronzes, that and the fact that he also later busted the notion that the cave paintings couldn't have been painted before 6000 circa,®® whatever date it was that Bishop assigned to Genesis, so knocked out the cave-man conception of our ancestors, whose 'archaic' created the modern, i.e., Picasso et. al... Pound, I think, was a bit more heavily into the culture-morphology of F*, but he basically liked F for personal reasons, too, not the least of which was the look-alike aspect, red hair, too, as I recall.** P began reading F in 1925-6.

®as quite different method from the Gold. Bough of Frazer

®®this with Bastian when Altamira disc. by Riviere as Pleisto.

*as was Spengler (the morph. run wld go something like Vico-Goethe-Von Humboldt (Kosmos)-Agassiz-Frobenius-Spengler-Appollinaire-Brooks Adams (Henry's brother, used by both P & O extensively)-Jung.... (((I may leave out a few steps in Germany)))

**P saw F at MOMA in 1938 at cave painting exhibit and sd "we looked as if we came from the same egg." Also, remember, Odysseus may be another of those red-heads. And see H.D.'s end to torment on the 'cat'. In the Cantos F is rainmaker

Frobenius of course more crucial now than ever because he was 1st to see structure of Africa before its destruction and indicate its rejuvenation by knowing what error (Pound) was responsible for the loss of its paideuma. Touchy point in the method: racism? (Victor Berard, another one P & O had in common, who disc. the

Homeric paideuma in Phonecian periploi - see also Black Athena by Bernal (just came out last year) - of course L.A. Waddell the other P & O had in common, but you don't want to get into that now.)

The African tale O got from P (in African Genesis) which he told to me orally was: Gassire's Lute. It's about what I call the "strengthing method," the move from 4 to 5.

What do you mean O-F materials are 'mislaid' at the archive. What does the curator have to say? If they were mixed up with George's [Butterick] papers (unlikely) then they're here. The 2 tales are in Afr. Gen., & you can read the Fox articles & hope to find the O notes later, if you need to.

Work cut out. Best of luck, John Clarke

P.S. you may know all this, but all I had to say today, sorry.